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VOLUME 10, 2006

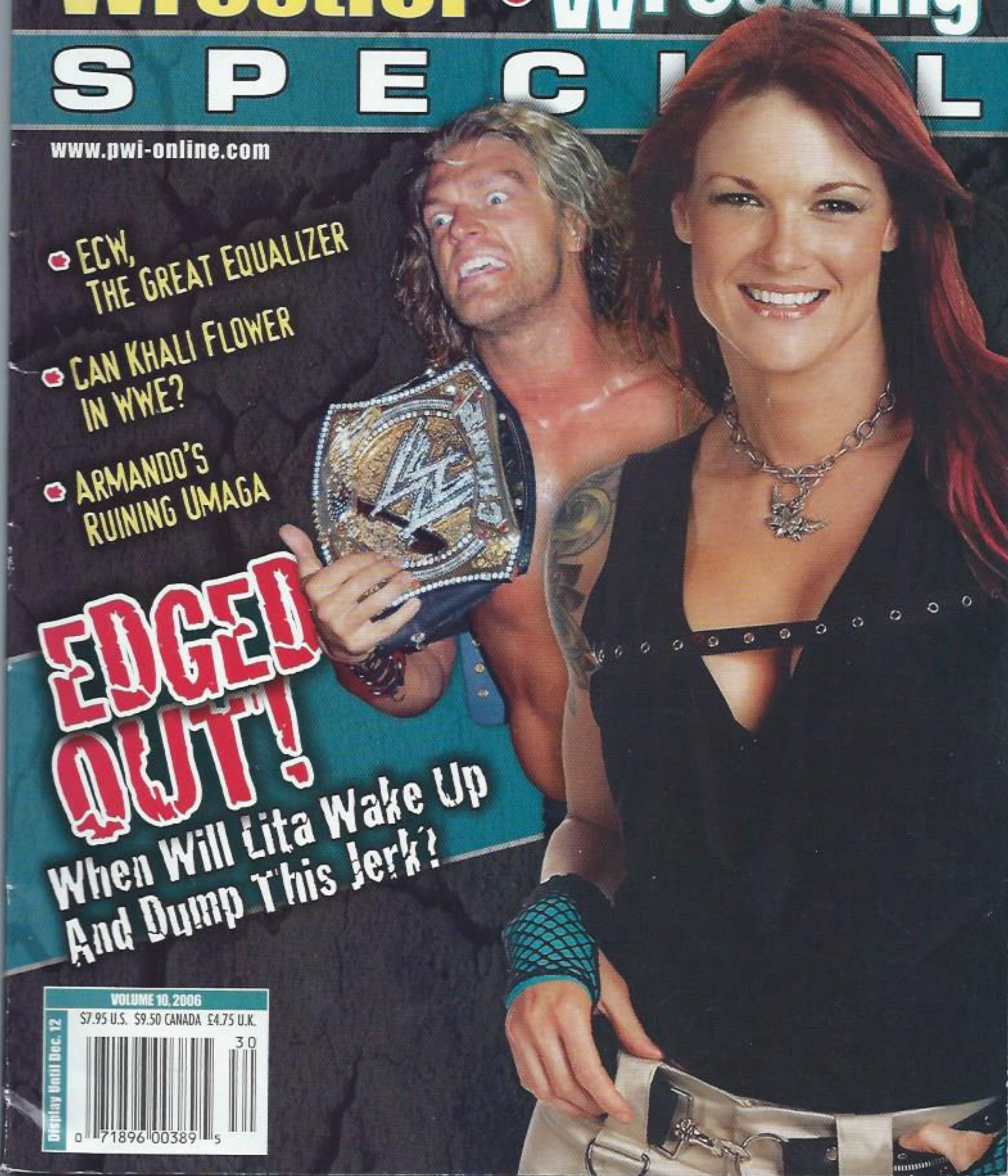
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NAMES MAKIN' NEWS

BY HARRY BURKETT

FOR 367 DAYS, **Rob Van Dam** sat on the sidelines, fully aware that his hiatus due to an injured knee was taking away precious time from the prime of his career. For 20 days, Van Dam enjoyed success beyond his wildest dreams, holding both the Raw World and ECW championships. Then, in only three days, he faced marijuana possession charges and lost both championships.

He would have 30 days to think about his behavior—and how his actions led to his red-hot career taking such a chilly turn.

Van Dam, whose real name is **Robert Szatkowski**, and **Sabu**, whose real name is **Terry Brunk**, were stopped for speeding on July 2 at 10:15 p.m. near the southern Ohio town of Hanging Rock. Van Dam and Sabu had appeared at an ECW show earlier in the evening in

Huntington, West Virginia.

According to the Associated Press, the Ohio state trooper smelled marijuana and went on to search the car. He found 18 grams of marijuana and five tablets of the prescription painkiller Vicodin among Van Dam's belongings. He discovered a pipe used to smoke marijuana, along with nine pills that remained unidentified as of press time. Van Dam was charged with possession of marijuana, and Sabu was accused of possessing drug paraphernalia. Both men were also charged with drug abuse. Four days later, their attorneys were granted continuances in Ironton Municipal Court and their cases were postponed until an unspecified date.

The impact on Van Dam's career was immediate. The following night, on July 3, he lost the Raw World title to **Edge** in a three-way match also involving **John Cena**. On Independence Day, **Paul Heyman** turned against Van Dam, causing him to lose the ECW belt to **The Big Show**. WWE found RVD in violation of its wellness policy and suspended him without pay for 30 days. Sabu was not suspended, but was fined \$1,000.

As expected, Van Dam took the controversy in stride. RVD seemed more upset over the fact that he had missed yet another opportunity to wrestle in front of his hometown fans.

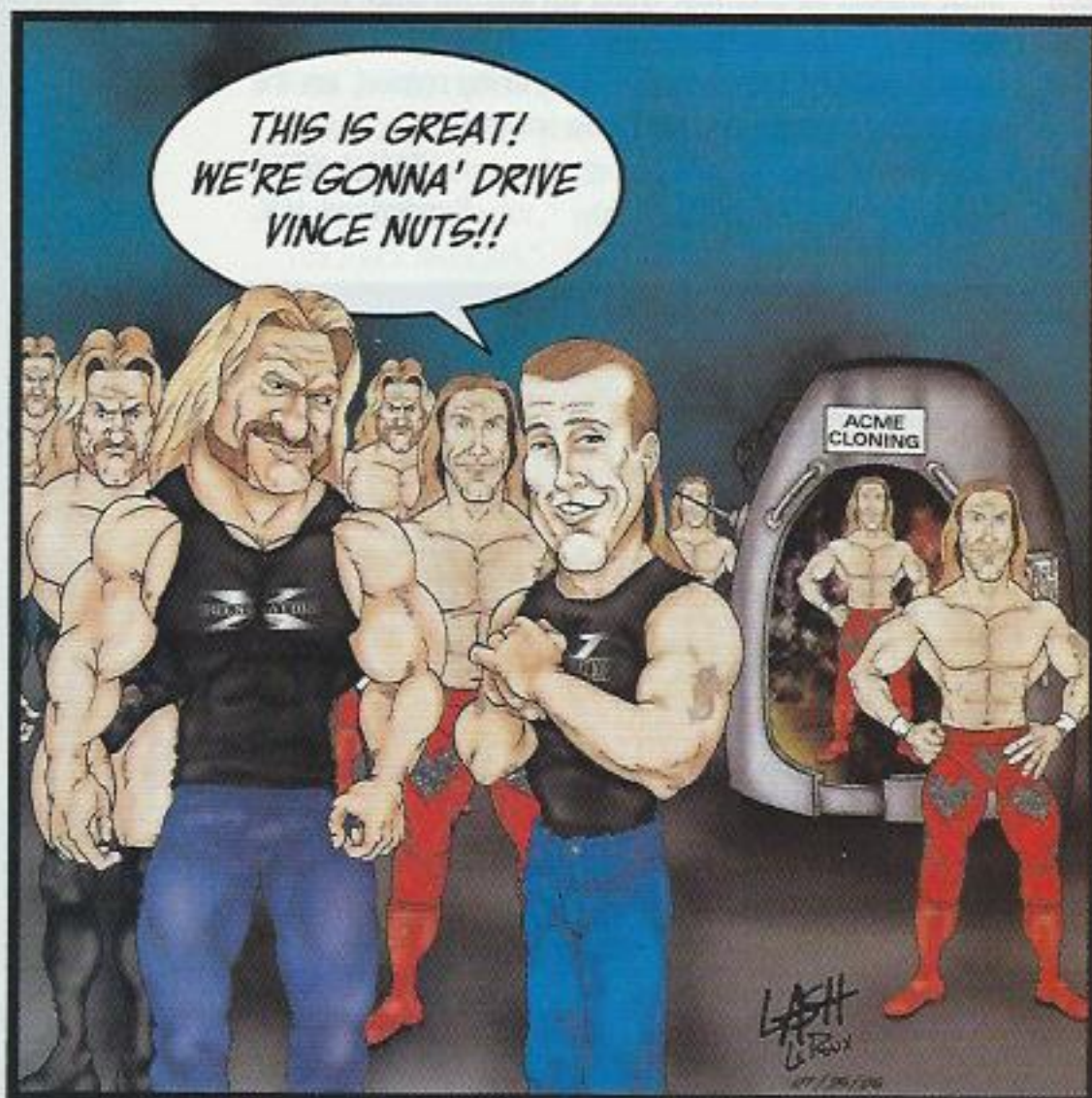
"Fans and friends in Battle Creek, sorry once again," he wrote on robvandam.com. "I've never wrestled in front of my hometown my whole career, and it looks like that will remain the case for now ... This show coming up in July seemed like it would finally be my day, but, alas, I share the disappointment with you. One thing's for sure: It'll be a lot easier to come back if all you 'biggest-breakfast-table-in-the-world-having' Michiganders sell that Kellogg Arena out! Otherwise, you might have to wait until I book that show after I retire, and who knows when that could be?"

For a more in-depth analysis of this situation, check out my "Blindsided" column in this issue.

There was also some upheaval regarding WWE's blue brand, with **Booker T** ascending yet another throne by capturing the Smackdown World title from **Rey Mysterio Jr.** at the Great American Bash. Mysterio had connected with a 619 and a frog splash, but the referee had been knocked out of the ring and wasn't able to make the three-

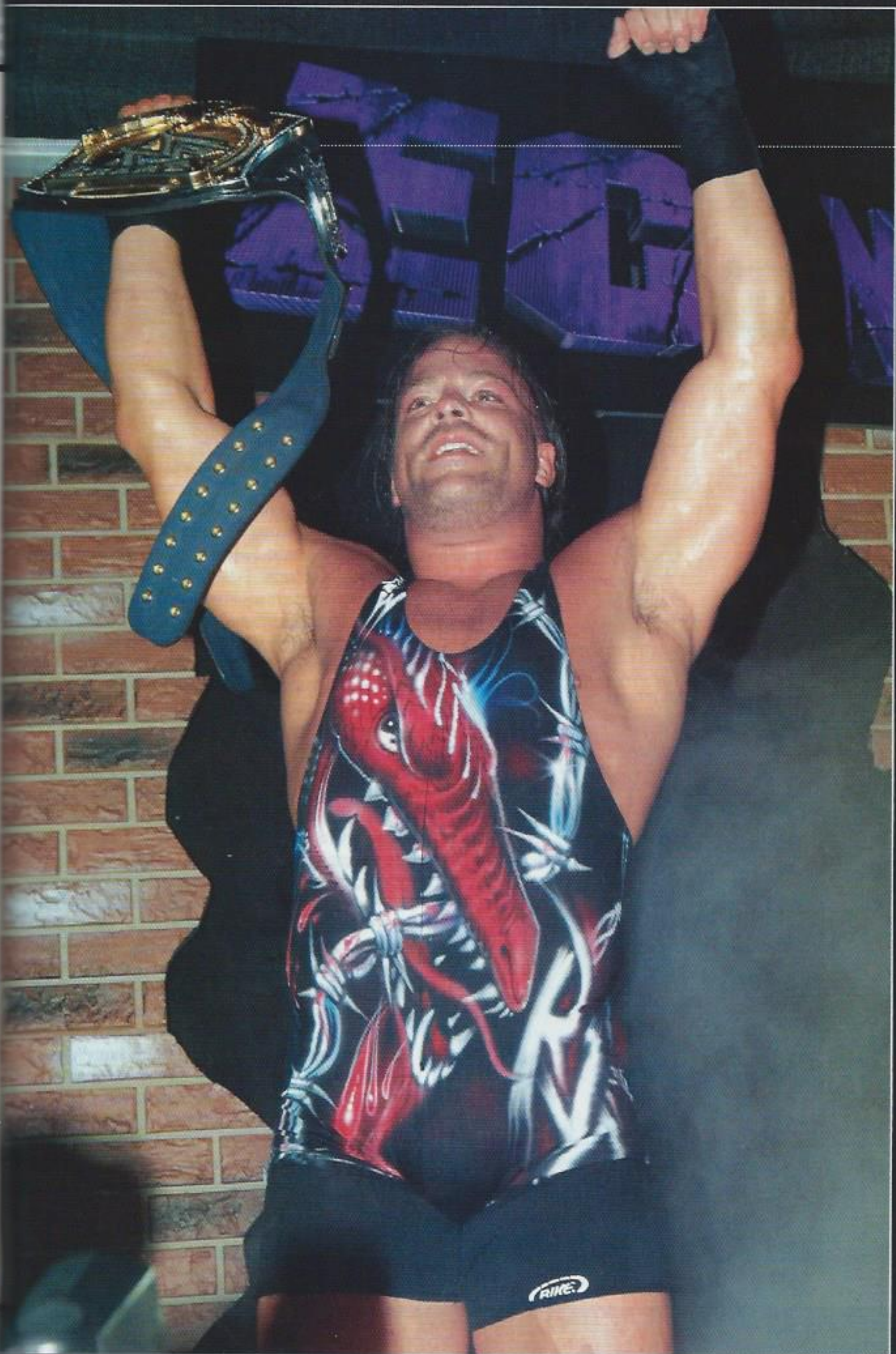
"LASHING OUT!"

BY LASH LEROUX



Rob Van Dam's Title Reign Goes Up In Smoke

■ ■ ■





King Booker reigns supreme in Smackdown

count. Then **King Booker** caught the champion with a low blow and dropped him with a "Bookend." He tried to finish off Misterio with a steel chair, but the champ kicked it back at him.

At that moment, **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ran into the ring with another chair—supposedly to help his friend—and "accidentally" kayoed Misterio. King Booker made the cover just as the official recovered to score the pinfall. Booker, already a five-time WCW champion, had won his first world title in WWE.

Batista made his return to Smackdown pay-per-views, facing **Mr. Kennedy** at the Great American Bash. The former Raw and Smackdown World champion, who had missed six months due to an arm injury, seemed to be in top shape. The fans chanted "Ba-tis-ta" as he decimated Kennedy, opening a head wound in the early going and tormenting the bucket-mouthed superstar with three spinebusters and a power bomb. A raging Batista threw Kennedy into the corner, began choking him with his boot, and wouldn't let go. The big man refused to release the choke within the five-count, so the referee had no choice but to disqualify him.

Kennedy might have scored the biggest win of his career, but one thing was for sure: "The Animal" was back!

Also at the Bash, **Ashley** beat **Jillian Hall**, **Kristal**,

and **Michelle McCool** in a four-way match ... **The Undertaker** beat ECW champion The Big Show in a non-title bout, dubbed as a "Punjabi Prison" match. Show was substituting for **The Great Khali**, who was pulled from the event after physicians discovered that he had an elevated level of liver enzymes ... WWE cruiserweight champion **Gregory Helms** pinned **Matt Hardy** ... New U.S. champion **Finlay** defeated **William Regal** ... Smackdown World tag team champions **Spanky Kendrick** and **Paul London** defeated **The Pit Bulls**, **Kid Kash** and **Jamie Noble**.

On July 24, one night after the Great American Bash, another potentially historic event took place. **Stephanie McMahon** gave birth to her first child, a baby girl weighing eight pounds seven ounces. Stephanie, of course, is married to **Triple-H**, and the name of their daughter is **Aurora Rose Levesque**. That night's *Raw* had to be completely revamped due to the absences of all the McMahons and Triple-H.

As one life is brought into the world, one is taken away. **Bob Orton Sr.**, the grandfather of current WWE star **Randy Orton**, passed away on July 16 in his adopted hometown of Las Vegas. Bob Sr. wrestled in nearly every major American territory from the 1950s through the 1970s. A six-time Southern champion, Orton enjoyed his greatest success in Florida, where he groomed his son, **Bob Jr.**, for a successful career in his own right. The "Big O" also established his credentials in the old WWWF, headlining against then-champion **Bruno Sammartino** in New York's Madison Square Garden.

It's too bad that Bob Sr., who took a keen interest in his grandson's career, didn't live to see Randy's feud with **Hulk Hogan** reach its climax at SummerSlam. But I'm sure he was darn proud of the third-generation superstar.

Speaking of departures, **Mark Henry** will be absent from Smackdown for a while. Poor Henry, who was just beginning to gain momentum after nine years of struggling in WWE, injured his knee while charging Misterio Jr. in the corner during a six-man tag team match on the July 15 edition of *Saturday Night's Main Event*. Henry slowly reached over and tagged Finlay, and then rolled out of the ring. Paramedics treated Henry as Misterio, Batista, and **Bobby Lashley** went on to defeat Henry, Finlay, and Booker T.

Dr. James Andrews, who operated on Henry's knee three days later, discovered that the former Olympian's patella tendon was torn completely off the bone and his kneecap was split. According to *wwe.com*, Henry would miss at least eight months of action. Henry recently extended his 10-year contract with WWE; unfortunately, this injury will waste much of that time, putting his future career with WWE in jeopardy.

Raw announcer **Jim Ross** has a new gig. A well-known Oklahoma Sooners fan, Ross is the newest columnist for the *OU Insider*, a college-based publication for



Karma kicks Henry's ass

Oklahoma University sports fans. In an interview posted on scout.com, Ross discussed his love of Oklahoma football as a youth. "I grew up in eastern Oklahoma, hauled hay in the summer, played football, and listened to the OU Sooners on Saturdays in the fall. But everyone I knew did."

Regarding the WWE phenomenon, Ross said, "its legacy goes all the way back to the grassroots sport and entertainment popularity of pro wrestling of the late-1930s and '40s. Even in those days it would sell out Madison Square Garden and the Cow Palace, so it was no shock to see it eventually become TV material. Of course, it really took off with the advent and proliferation of cable-TV."

Fortunately, Ross wasn't asked about the rise of the "Kiss My Ass Club" or how prominent WWE employees are the subject of mockery and ridicule, even as they undergo procedures for life-threatening conditions. Something tells me that "good ol' J.R." will get a lot more respect at OU.

As documented earlier in this column, all three of WWE's major heavyweight titles have been in a bit of turmoil as of late, and, in TNA, the NWA World title scene is just as volatile. **Jim Cornette**, the public face of TNA management, handed **Jeff Jarrett** his sixth NWA World title shortly after Slammiversary. By the end of July's Victory Road, the world title picture was as controversial as ever.

At Victory Road, **Christian Cage**, **Sting**, **Scott Steiner**, and **Samoa Joe** faced each other in a four-way match to determine the top contender to Jarrett's title. Cage had just flattened Steiner with a frog splash and was going for a cover when Sting pulled him off. As the two friends argued, Steiner dumped Cage and Joe over the top rope. At that moment, Sting snared Steiner in the "Scorpion Deathlock" to gain the submission win.

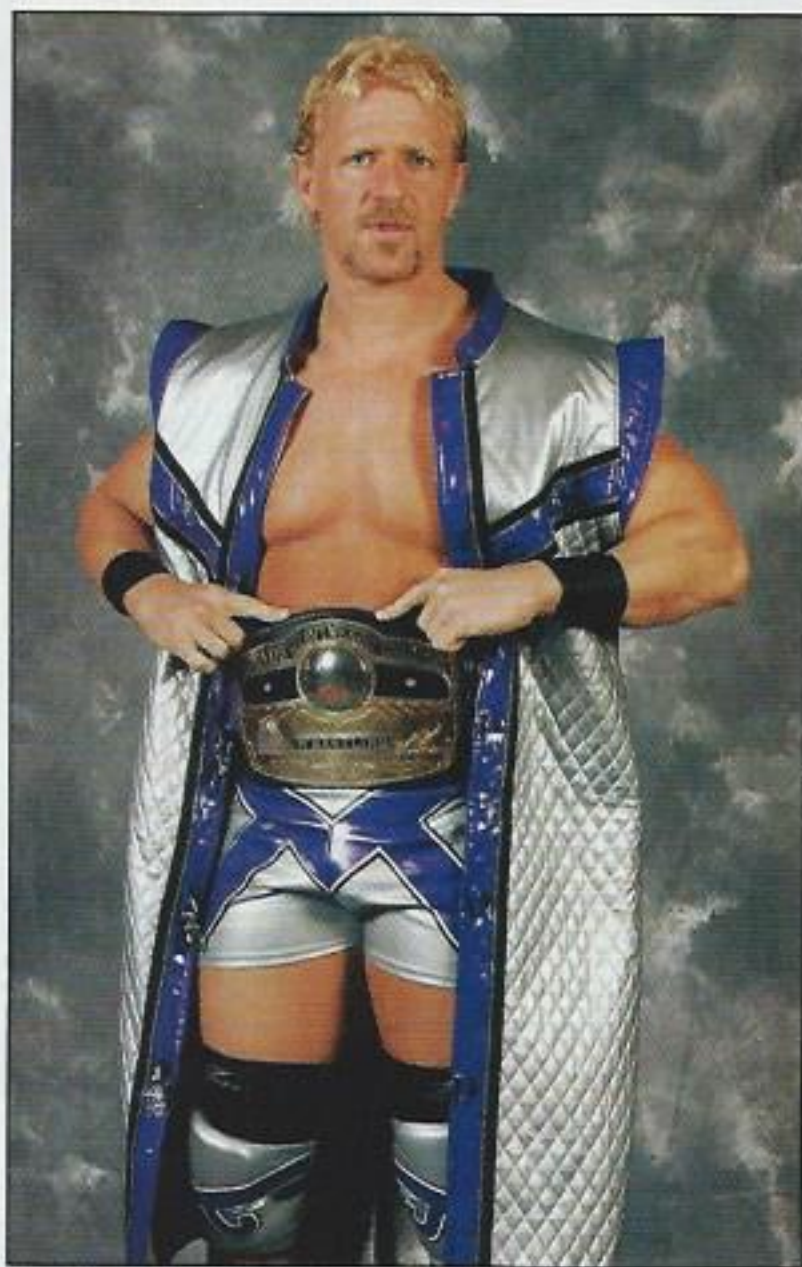
That wasn't the end of the story, however. Cage confronted Sting about breaking up his earlier pin attempt. Sting, obviously, didn't believe he did anything that was out

of bounds during a competitive match. Finally, Cage extended his hand and hugged Sting. But, even as Cage applauded him outside the ring, Sting still seemed annoyed by the entire situation.

Cage vs. Sting? It could happen.

In other bouts at Victory Road, **Christopher Daniels**, **A.J. Styles**, and **Sirelda** defeated **America's Most Wanted** and **Gail Kim** in a mixed tag match with the NWA World tag team belts at stake ... **The James Gang** and **Abyss** beat **Team 3D** ... **Jay Lethal** and **Chris Sabin** defeated **Kevin Nash** and **Alex Shelley** ... **Raven** beat Director

of Authority **Larry Zbyszko** in a "Hair vs. Hair" match ... X champion **Senshi** pinned the returning **Frankie Kazarian** ... **Hotstuff Hernandez** and **Homicide** beat **Sonjay Dutt** and **Ron Killings** ... **Rhino** and **Monty Brown** battled to a no-contest ... **Shane Douglas** led **The Naturals** to victory over



Jarrett wears the belt again

NEWS ANALYSIS

GAMMIT! That's the level of frustration most people feel regarding Rob Van Dam's latest predicament. Van Dam has never denied his infatuation with the feel-good smoke, and, of all times to be busted by a state trooper, it had to be on the 19th day of his historic dual reign as Raw and ECW champ. Perhaps it's just as well. If RVD was indulging in careless behavior, he certainly paid a price ... a very high price.

ALL HAIL KING BOOKER! How ridiculous is Smackdown getting? Personally, I think Booker T—considering his track record and in-ring ability—can make a superb Smackdown World champion. But this "King Booker" stuff? It's amusing, but it strips wrestling of all credibility. I got the same feeling when Doink, Dink, Pink, and Wink would appear on WWF TV. I'm investing so much time into something so childlike!

THE BILLION-DOLLAR BABY. When Shane and Marisa McMahon welcomed their son into the world a couple of years ago, a child with the McMahon name no less, it didn't garner nearly as much attention as the birth of Stephanie McMahon and Triple-H's daughter. There's one important matter to consider, though: How much trouble will J.R. have pronouncing "Aurora" when she prances into the ring in about 2026?

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE "O." WWE never brought Bob Orton Sr. on television, so we missed out on seeing Bob Sr., Bob Jr., and Randy sharing the stage. Bob Jr., however, told me that Bob Sr. followed Randy's career and offered advice, but he remained as ornery as ever, refusing to undergo hip replacement surgery when he needed it. That's old school for you. I think a posthumous WWE Hall of Fame induction is in order.

STUNG BY CAGE? Before the four-way top contender's match involving Christian Cage, Sting, Scott Steiner, and Samoa Joe at Victory Road, Cage said Sting was like a carton of milk: "He's good for you, has all the nutrients, smells all right, but you taste it and it doesn't taste right ... It expired yesterday." Despite his "every man for himself" attitude, Cage got mad when Sting interrupted his pin attempt on Steiner. What gives?

Elix Skipper and David Young.

News from Maryland Championship Wrestling: **Ruckus**, who rose to prominence in CZW, won the sixth annual Shane Shamrock Memorial Cup and the MCW cruiserweight title on July 9, beating out stars such as **Derek Frazier**, Chris Sabin, **Petey Williams**, **Jerry Lynn**, **Steve Anthony**, **Josh Daniels**, **Qeenan Creed**, Alex Shelley, **Rich Myers**, **Tom Carter**, and **Bad Boy Luke** in an elimination event. The show was held at North Point Plaza in Dundalk, Maryland ... MCW owner **Dan McDevitt** now has no choice but to deal with his nemesis, **Adam Flash**. McDevitt wanted him out of the company, yet Flash recently captured the MCW heavyweight title, ensuring that he'll be on the Maryland scene a bit longer ... Christian Cage pinned Monty Brown on July 22 at a MCW show at Fort Meade, located in Odenton, Maryland.

This 'n' that: **Bryan Danielson** retained the Ring of Honor title against **Sonjay Dutt** in Philadelphia when the referee had to stop the match ... WWE has booked the 14,000-seat Budokan Hall for Raw and ECW shows on October 18 and 19 ... New Japan has stripped **Brock Lesnar** of the IWGP title due to visa



Lesnar's sent packing

problems and a contract dispute.

From the HULKING UP At The Wrong Man Dept.: Hulk Hogan has been taking quite a beating among the Tampa media, including the Tampa's *weeklyplanet.com*, because he accused his parents' caregiver, **William Guevara**, of taking over \$10,000 of unauthorized withdrawals from his parents' bank account. The Tampa Police Department awakened the 60-year-old Guevara on July 9, 2004, and took him into custody. Recently, Hogan learned that one of his relatives actually withdrew the money. Hogan's mother, **Ruth Bollea**, went on to sign a form stating she wanted prosecutors to drop the case.

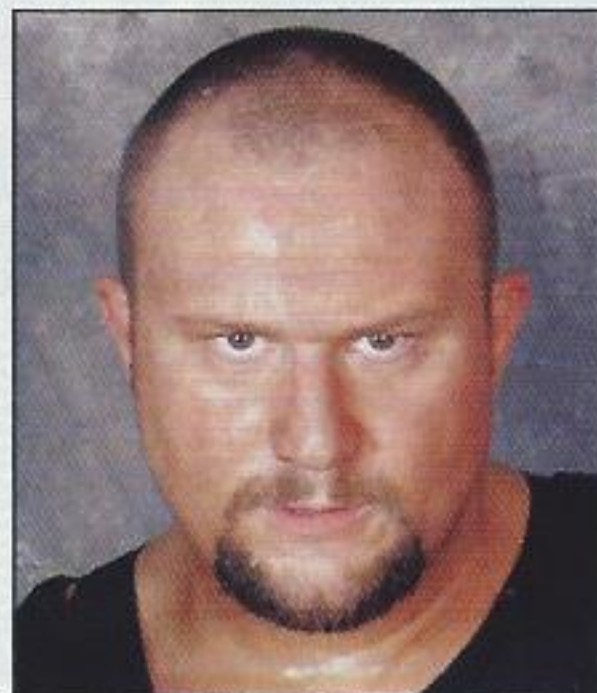
Sometimes, Hogan doesn't know best!

THUMBS UP

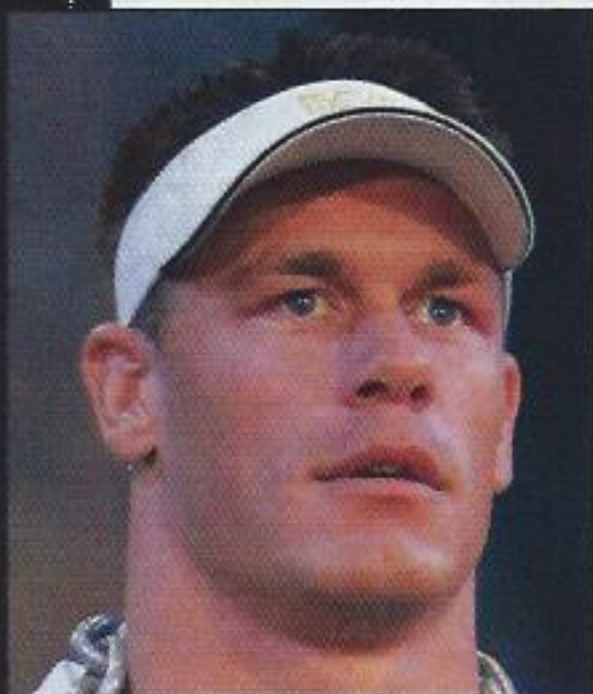


Thumbs Up to Scott Steiner. When "Big Poppa Pump" debuted for TNA, it had been a while since we had seen him on the national stage and we had our doubts about whether his body could withstand many more matches. Apparently, we worried needlessly. Steiner is healthier than we've seen him in a very long time, and he was done well in weathering the brutal offense Samoa Joe sent his way during their very entertaining feud. The former WCW champion is locked, loaded, and, perhaps, more dangerous than ever before.

By doing so, he has staked TNA's claim to its audience and basically told WWE that TNA isn't afraid. No, he might not be the most senior member of the TNA roster, but, by speaking out against ECW and calling it as he sees it, he is becoming one of its leaders.

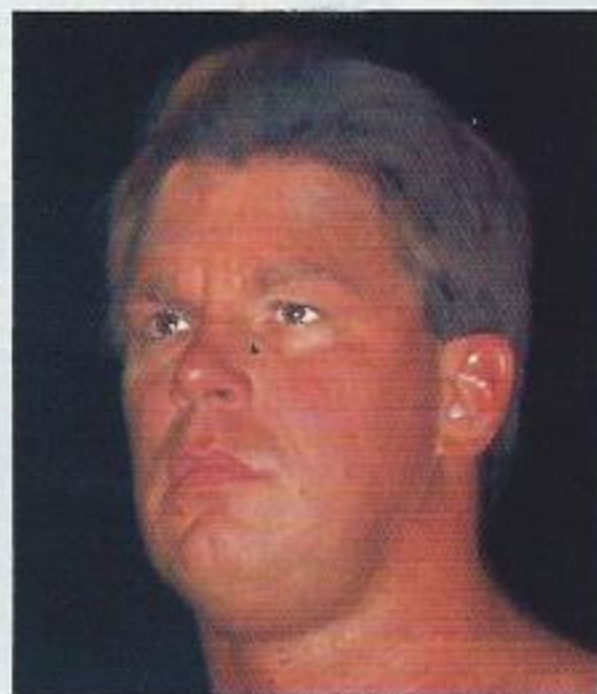


Thumbs Up to Brother Ray. TNA's Brother Ray has always been one of the sport's most outspoken individuals. The big man never minces words. Lately, he's been verbally attacking the new ECW product. He doesn't like it, not even a little bit, and he hasn't been afraid to share that opinion. By

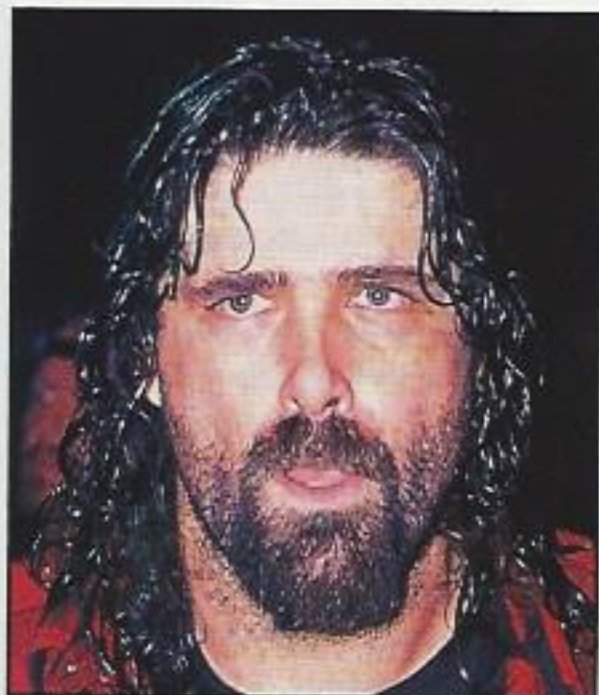


Thumbs Up to John Cena. Going into One Night Stand II, Cena knew the abuse he would take from the partisan ECW crowd. He knew that he would be entering an incredibly hostile environment, and he embraced that challenge in order to make his match against Rob Van Dam that much better. Though he ended up losing the title thanks to interference from Edge, the performance he gave was one of the best seen in many years. He took everything the ECW crowd had to offer and showed no fear whatsoever. He should have earned their respect.

Thumbs Up to John Bradshaw Layfield. JBL is not a likable guy. He looks down at nearly all of his counterparts and the fans, makes snide remarks, and then attempts to weasel his way out of them. He is just an all-around jerk. Yet, all of these negative personal attributes make him more than qualified to sit in *Smackdown's* color commentator's chair. No, you might not like him, but you're also not supposed to. He is on his way to becoming wrestling's number-one color commentator—just don't tell Jerry Lawler we said that.



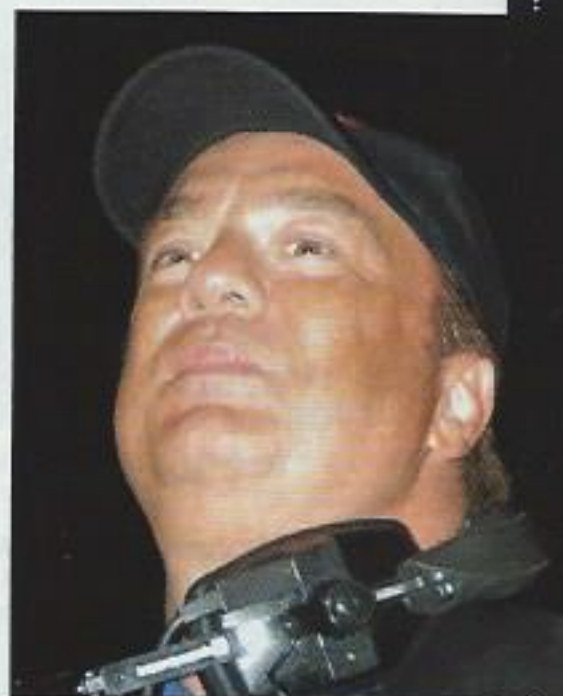
[THUMBS DOWN]



Thumbs Down to Mick Foley. It's one thing for a wrestler to enter a match knowing that he's not at 100 percent and might not be able to deliver the kind of performance he's used to turning in. It's another thing entirely for a wrestler—and especially a wrestler of Mick Foley's stature—to say that he's going to turn in a stinker of a match. Listening to Foley predict how awful his Vengeance match with Ric Flair was going to be made our stomach turn and disappointed us. Foley should be embarrassed.

even if it is the home of "extreme." The highly touted return of ECW has both alienated its loyal fans as well as turned off many of the newer generation. If we wanted to watch beautiful women prance around half-naked with no wrestling ability or absolutely ridiculous and infuriating angles, we'd check out *Raw*.

Thumbs Down to ECW. The former renegade brand has given the fans zombies, portly male strippers, The Big Show as its champion, and the ridiculous "Kelly's Exposé." None of these antics belong in ECW—

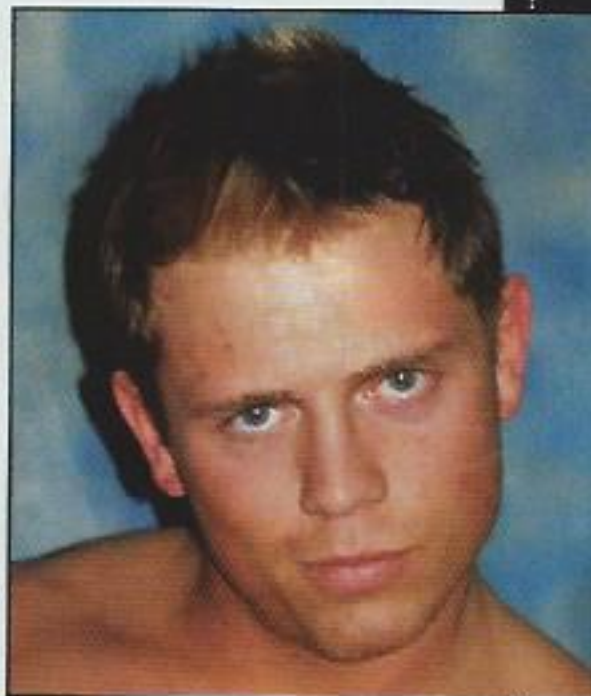


Thumbs Down to Konnan. Just because Konnan claims to be the biggest thing in Mexican wrestling doesn't mean that TNA should promote him as one of the most important stars on its roster. He'd have a point if TNA promoted more in Mexico, but it doesn't. If TNA does decide to run live events south of the border, then Konnan will have a point, but until that day, his argument holds little water. If he wants a more prestigious position within TNA, he's going to have to earn it, because it won't be handed to him.



Thumbs Down to The Miz. When WWE signed The Miz—formerly of MTV's *Real World*—to a contract and brought him up to the Smackdown roster, it probably believed that he would help the brand connect with a

younger audience. Instead, what it has signed is an annoying personality who likely doesn't matter to the audience WWE expected him to attract. Yes, he has a modicum of celebrity, but he has yet to show that he adds anything to Smackdown. He's just a more pumped up version of Jonny Fairplay, and we all know how well TNA fared when using him.



ON THE ROAD

WITH DAVE LENKER

SECOND CHANCES. IT'S amazing what they can do for WWE wrestlers. It's even more amazing to see who gets them sometimes.

Is that really Tatanka I've been seeing every Friday night on my TV screen? Is it me, or is that big Viscera—the man who won King of the Ring back in 1995 when he was big Mabel—who's still getting TV time virtually every Monday night as part of what I like to affectionately call Hacksaw Duggan's new J.O.B. Squad (any combination of Hacksaw, Viscera, Val Venis, Gene Snitsky, and Eugene)? Is this Finlay guy who's dabbling in main events for Smackdown the same guy I used to watch when he was known as The Belfast Bruiser in WCW?

I could have sworn I read somewhere that WWE resigned Shannon Moore, a man who accomplished nothing during his first stint in WWE and whose release was met with reactions like, "You mean Shannon Moore was still with WWE?"

Test, who was given every chance to succeed in a

huge way in WWE year after year during the "Attitude" era but never did, is now steamrolling Tommy Dreamer as one of ECW's top stars? Test on top of ECW? Makes perfect sense to me (*cough*). Have I been on the road in some bizarro wrestling world of late or what?

I think the second chance/comeback that's taken me most by surprise has been that of Umaga. I thought the weaker link of Three Minute Warning's three minutes of fame were long up by the time he was quietly released by WWE several years ago. A fairly successful stint by Jamal (as he was known then and during his first run in WWE) in All Japan impressed some, but I'd seen far too many second- and third-rate WWE and WCW rejects do well in that promotion to make much of it. Apparently, the right people in WWE made enough of it to re-sign the Samoan, slap some tribal face paint on him, give him an outstanding up-and-coming manager in Armando Alejandro Estrada, and treat him like a mysterious new monster that can't be beaten.

As of this writing, Umaga had yet to suffer a televised loss and had crunched virtually every low-level wrestler on the Raw roster, plus Ric Flair and a host of local kids who gladly accepted a big beating for a big

Umaga—formerly Jamal of Three Minute Warning—is somewhat of a surprise reclamation project by WWE, in the eyes of Dave Lenker. There seem to be other more deserving wrestlers that the company could reexamine for a second chance.



payday when WWE came to their town.

I don't pretend to understand this particular case. I wasn't all that impressed by Jamal four years ago, and I'm not exactly blown away by Umaga's skill set. Perhaps this "Samoan Bulldozer" really is, as some cynics suspect, WWE's cheap knockoff answer to a certain "Samoan Submission Machine" in TNA and Ring of Honor by the name of Samoa Joe, a man I consider the most exciting wrestler on the planet right now.

I'd like to see Mr. Estrada get a chance to manage someone with more long-term potential, but I have to give Umaga credit for making the most of his unlikely second chance and putting together a very unlikely winning streak.

I can think of one other WWE wrestler deserving of a similar second chance. He just happens to have been one of Umaga's more high-profile victims (in a forgettable match at Judgment Day). Unfortunately, he falls into the category of "low-level wrestler on the Raw roster." That man is Eugene.

A lot of us loved the Eugene story back in 2004. The funny simpleton who was the storyline "special" nephew of then-Raw General Manager Eric Bischoff made good against all odds under the tutelage of William Regal and even foiled Triple-H for a short time (before "The Game" ultimately destroyed him, of course). He even earned a cover of *PWI* back in his, um, heyday. We, of course, told you what WWE didn't necessarily want you to know back then—that Eugene was actually Nick Dinsmore, a very non-simpleton veteran of Ohio Valley Wrestling who earned the moniker "Mr. Wrestling" by virtue of his technical acumen.

Dinsmore hadn't much leverage when it came to character development in 2004. Before WWE Creative created Eugene, there was speculation that Dinsmore was in jeopardy of being released. Any role in the big show is a good role at a time like that.

Fast-forward a couple of years, and I can't say I'd be surprised if I were to hear about Dinsmore's release. Getting forced to enter drug rehab shortly after the death of Eddie Guerrero last November was a very real and very serious setback for him. Now he's been reduced to cane fodder for The Sandman at this year's ECW One Night Stand PPV, he was squashed by Umaga on PPV a few weeks later, and his comedic exploits seem about as groan-worthy as Scotty 2 Hotty's worm.

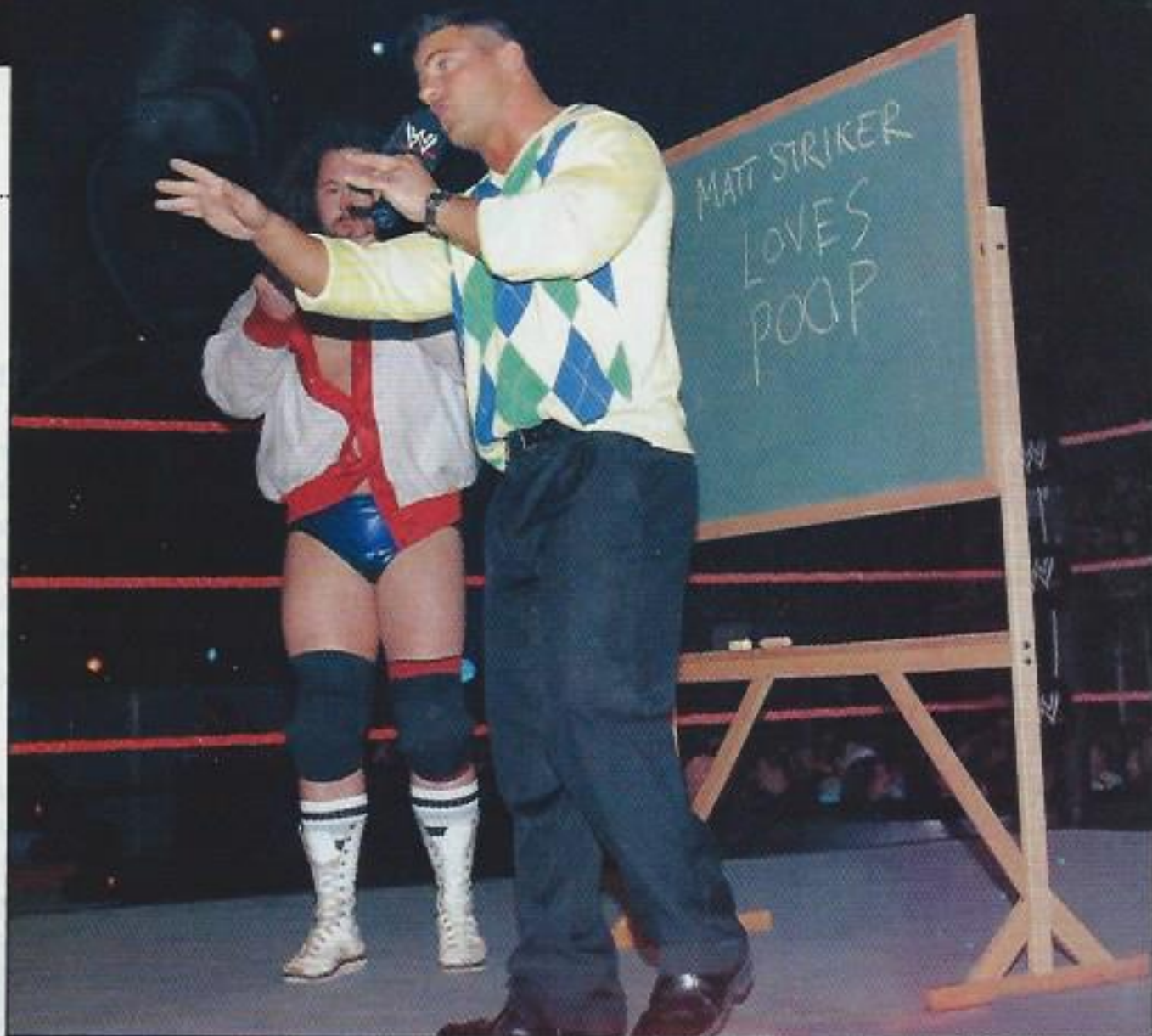
Nick "Eugene" Dinsmore was once considered one of the top technical wrestlers in WWE's developmental system. However, as Eugene, he has been reduced to comedic appearances coupled with the occasional beat down on *Raw*.

I've always liked Senior Writer Harry Burkett's plan to make ECW into something of a purgatory for WWE stars, a promotion to which Vince McMahon could ship wrestlers he wanted to punish or toughen up.

Imagine McMahon's surprise when, after finally tiring of Eugene's antics and banishing him to Heyman hell, he watches as Dinsmore comes back to life and starts tearing through the ECW roster as a technical wrestling machine with a badass attitude. I'm not much for using my column space to become a fantasy WWE booker, but I still believe there's a lot of potential in Mr. Dinsmore, who's shown he can form an emotional bond with fans, a huge key to any wrestler's success.

In fact, this might be one of WWE Creative's most overlooked shortcomings. It either saddles mid-carders with go-nowhere, one-dimensional personas (see Conway, Rob) or it gives up on too many younger non-main-eventers too quickly. If you're lucky enough to be someone like Kane, you can count on 1,001 attempts to tweak and re-tweak your character to breathe new fire into it. Eugene, it seems, is destined to be Eugene until the pink slip inevitably comes.

One look at Umaga should tell everyone that it doesn't have to be that way. Second chances can work for everyone, and everyone should get one. Maybe a few months from now, Umaga vs. Nick Dinsmore could really mean something.



[NO HOLDS BARRIED]

WITH WILL WELSH

ONCE AGAIN, the WWE Diva Search is upon us. The competition that brought you Christy Hemme (the 2004 winner), Ashley Massaro (the 2005 winner), Candice Michelle, Maria Kanellis, Michelle McCool, and Kristal Marshall is back. Though the competition will likely have concluded by the time this issue hits newsstands, I'm confident that they'll have been enough bikini, pie-eating, and obstacle-course contests to have kept the entirety of WWE's male fan base eagerly awaiting the next WWE Diva DVD release.

There's no doubt that the one thing the Diva Search does well is to feature incredibly sexy and wild women for the wrestling fan's consumption. Throughout all three competitions, the women WWE has chosen to compete have all been attractive, somewhat athletic,

and more than willing to display their barely clad bodies in front of a national audience on live TV (although I do recall one competitor who was on the shy side and seemed a little uncomfortable in normal WWE Diva attire; I still wonder how she ever made the cut).

Of course, none of the above is saying that the wrestling fan is actively looking to consume such a televised delicacy; for the past three years, WWE has force fed its fans the Diva Search whether the fans liked it or not. And, as you'll recall, many fans haven't liked it. In fact, some fans have downright hated the Diva Search and have refused to watch any of the segments featuring the competition. To them, the contest is a paramount waste of time that WWE could better utilize by having its wrestlers actually wrestle.

Yes, more than a few WWE fans enjoy the competi-

tion, the silliness it provides, and the sheer amount of sugary sweet eye candy that parades around the ring during it. But there are also lot of fans who haven't enjoyed the competition even a little bit—and, as is the way with complainers, these fans have been a little more vocal.

Okay, a lot more vocal.

So, then, considering all of that, why has WWE decided to pursue this venue for a third-straight year? Why irritate so many already fickle fans by presenting something that they already have proclaimed to hate twice over? Why push the button of so many fans by turning portions of your weekly wres-



Many WWE Diva Search graduates only succeed in successfully donning satin and lace lingerie outside of the bedroom. But some, such as Christy Hemme (shown here strangling fellow contestant Carmella), are capable of a bit more inside the squared circle.

ting show into a glorified *Girls Gone Wild* contest?

Because it makes sense.

There are going to be a lot of people out there who disagree with that. There are a lot of people who say that the only reason the Diva Search was brought back for the third time was because Vince McMahon likes it—and what Vince McMahon likes, Vince McMahon gets. It's an easy argument to make, especially when McMahon reaps the benefits of the Diva Search by having a former contestant such as Candice Michelle crawl all over him for months at a time.

It's an argument that would also be wrong. McMahon reaps rewards from the Diva Search all right, but they're not the rewards you think they are. The Diva Search, believe it or not, serves a purpose or two. They may be a little hard to find as WWE has already said goodbye to Hemme, and Massaro has done little in her first year with the company worth mentioning, but the Diva Search does serve a purpose other than stocking WWE's roster with lovely women who are willing to act as romantic foils.

In case you haven't noticed, more than a few of the Diva Search contestants now have prominent roles with the company. Maria has done remarkably well in her position as Raw's backstage interviewer; she's smart, funny, and one heck of a believable ditz. Kristal has done well with her interviewing role, too. And neither of the women has looked horrible when they've been forced to wrestle (but they haven't looked great, either).

Candice is arguably one of WWE's most popular Divas at the moment (and certainly one of McMahon's favorites) and got WWE some publicity thanks to her mega-popular role as the spokeswoman for GoDaddy.com. Long-legged Michelle McCool, who was just recently added to Smackdown's roster, seems to have a future in the ring as a wrestler. Heck, even Christy Hemme, before she departed WWE, brought more energy and spunk to the ring than many of her male counterparts—and she has been a great addition to TNA since debuting with that promotion.

Yes, all of the women mentioned above have made positive contributions to WWE.

There's also another aspect of the Diva Search that makes the contest attractive to WWE executives: It makes all of the above women expendable, no matter how successful they eventually become within WWE.

It's not something that any of the women already employed by WWE want to recognize, but almost every single one of them found through the Diva Search could be replaced by someone within the ranks of the latest group of Diva Search finalists. That means, when it comes time



Candice Michelle gained fame and recognition (and a pictorial in *Playboy* magazine) after her appearance for GoDaddy.com in the company's provocative Super Bowl ad as well as being part of the Diva Search.

to renew a contract, WWE has all of the bargaining power and the girls have none. If these women want to retain their positions with WWE, they'll have to accept whatever contract WWE is offering them while keeping their negotiations to a minimum. If not, WWE will replace them with some other hungry and incredibly attractive woman ready to become its next Diva for a lower dollar amount.

The days of the \$100-million lawsuit brought against WWE by a Diva are long gone—and the Diva Search is one of the reasons why.

So, the next time you or your of your friends are complaining about the Diva Search—or just ogling the women in the Diva Search—you'll at least know a few of the reasons why WWE has pursued it for the third year in a row. There is a method to the madness. □

THE INSIDER

(The opinions expressed in "The Insider" are those of Brandi Mankiewicz alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of anyone else on the staff of this magazine.)

IT'S BEEN A weird few weeks for me. While I'm enjoying my first summer home in 11 years, it's also been the wildest summer I can remember. My area, the Pennsylvania Poconos, experienced its worst flood

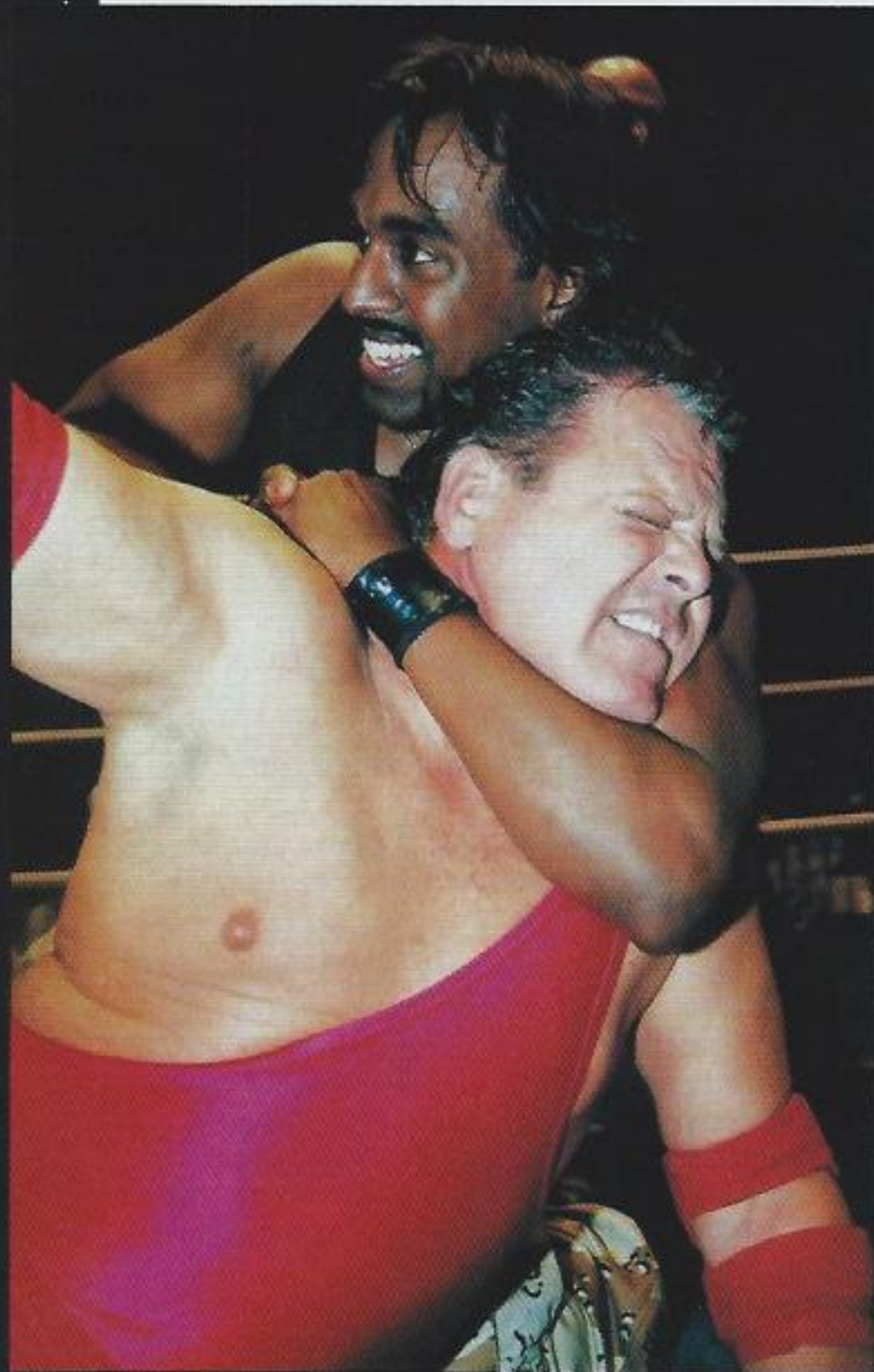
since Hurricane Agnes in 1972. On the downside, we lost entire roads, houses, and towns. On the plus side, I now have a better reason for not driving south to Philadelphia: The road leading to it is gone. I'm happy that this latest round of water didn't totally destroy downtown Bloomsburg, but I'm upset that the levy system in Wilkes-Barre didn't fail. I was hoping to see some water rushing through the streets of Wilkes-Barre just because that dirty place needs a good cleaning. Now that it's all over, though, I'm still waiting for someone to explain to me how I qualify for FEMA disaster funding from a flood, even though I live high on a mountain.

Adding to the weirdness was the death of my friend Marlon Kalkai, a.k.a. Tiger Khan. Khan was found dead in California on June 26. I've known him for years, first meeting him at a Pennsylvania Championship Wrestling show. Marlon was always one of the nicest, more reserved wrestlers I've ever met. He had aspirations to get to WWE, just like every other wrestler, except he didn't let it become part of his personality. He always had the demeanor of someone who was only there to entertain the fans and have some fun. I know I am one person who will miss him.

Keeping with the weirdness theme, I may as well admit that, yes, I watched ECW the other night. No, I didn't enjoy it—well, most of it. My first problem with it is Kelly Kelly. She's even more useless than the average Diva contest winner. Why would the powers that preside over ECW disgrace the Philly fans by letting this bimbo do the worst pseudo stripper routine this side of Mae Young? I never thought I'd ever beg for the return of Kimona Wana-Laya's, but I found myself almost doing so. *Almost*. Granted, they probably had to kill time thanks to what I'm sure was a massive show rewrite following Rob Van Dam and Sabu's best "Hacksaw" Jim Duggan and Iron Sheik impersonation just two nights before in Ohio. Way to go, RVD. Nice way to end your dual title reign. Go explain this one in *High Times*.

In the midst of all this ECW crap came a shining light. Thirty seconds that should change the future of this ill-fated wrestling troupe. C.M. Punk debuted. Why is this so earth-shattering? Well, it's because he's better than you. No, I'm serious. Let me explain, complete with bullets:

◆ **He's Straight Edge.** Yep, that means no drinking, no drugs, and no promiscuous sex. He doesn't damage his body with stupid crap that could kill him or keep him from attaining his goals. While everyone else is partying and living the Rock 'n' Roll lifestyle, Punk's busy working out and studying tapes so he can better himself. In other words, he's better than 98 percent of



The wrestling world lost a great performer, and an even better person, when Tiger Khan passed away in late-June. He was one of the rare wrestlers that never let his professional goals dictate his personality.

BY BRANDI MANKIEWICZ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

wrestlers and every wrestling fan. His clean lifestyle automatically puts him on a pedestal, but his ability to continue with it while surrounded by the perils of the road is amazing.

◆ **Integrity.** C.M. Punk has never once strayed from his Straight Edge high road. He doesn't pretend to be something; he *is* something. His willingness to adhere to these high standards should make him the model for WWE's Wellness Policy. In other words, he's the direct opposite of Rob Van Dam.

◆ **Genius.** Punk is one of the smarter people I've ever encountered. He may be too intelligent for most fans to even relate to. He thinks on a higher level than the typical wrestling person, which may account for why some think he's aloof. It's not that he doesn't get them; *they* just don't get *him*. This leads me to ...

◆ **Promo ability.** The art of a good promo is being lost in this business, but it's guys like Punk who keep it alive. Okay, I lie. There aren't any others who are as good as Punk. It's all him these days. He has the ability to make the whiny smarks pee their pants with glee while making the Hot Topic-shopping goth girls drool with puppy love. I haven't witnessed such promo power since the heyday of Ric Flair. Or so many man crushes. I swear, the typical ROH fan (i.e. male comic book freaks who pay girls for sex) would scream like a girl to support Punk in his quest for the title. The same happened in Ohio Valley Wrestling, only the fans were also unwashed, smelly, and most likely named Earl.

◆ **"It" factor.** In the entertainment industry, the "It" factor is oh-so-important. It's that intangible element that makes a rock star out of a mere mortal. It's a natural charisma that can't be taught. You either have it or you don't. It's just that simple. You can't be taught it; you can't enhance it; you can't buy it. You must be born with it. Punk was. Mark Henry wasn't.

◆ **Magnetism.** It's amazing how many girlies have fallen by the wayside while trying to jump on the Punk bandwagon. It's even more amazing to see just how far each has fallen since being run over by that bandwagon and crunched into the dirt below. They all forget that Punk's main purpose in life is to be the best at wrestling, and their silly antics only distract him from that



C.M. Punk is another wrestler who's always been loyal to himself and has refused to compromise his integrity to get where he is today. And that's why he's better than you.

goal. Once they interfere, they're thrown from that bandwagon and become a speed bump on the road of life.

◆ **Vindication.** That first promo may have seemed like an introduction, but it was more of a milestone, a celebration of an attained goal. Here was this punk kid from Chicago—who had been through it all, who lived through hell—on TV talking to the world. Those few sentences absolved him of every boast that he'd one day be a WWE wrestler. That one promo should shut up anyone who ever told him that he couldn't do it, shush every wrestler who tried to steer him wrong, and silence those who secretly wished he'd never make it. That, my students, is why C.M. Punk is better than you. Always remember that. He's the only reason to watch ECW. I guarantee you'll never see a cheesy striptease from him. □

BLIND - SIDED

BY HARRY BURKETT

AS OF 10:14 p.m. on July 2, Rob Van Dam was on top of the world. He was one of the few men in wrestling history to hold two major heavy-weight championships simultaneously: the Raw World title and the ECW title. His career, which had floundered in WWE for several years, was suddenly in the fast lane.

One minute later, at 10:15 p.m., the whirling lights atop an Ohio State Police squad car signaled the end of Van Dam's incredible run. Apparently, RVD had been going *too* fast in the proverbial fast lane. The trooper smelled marijuana and ordered Van Dam—and his travel buddy, Sabu—out of the vehicle. Police say they found 18 grams of marijuana and five tablets of Vicodin, a prescription painkiller, with Van Dam. Sabu had a pipe used to smoke marijuana, along with nine unidentified pills, in his possession.

Both men were arrested; Van Dam was charged with possession of marijuana, and Sabu was accused of possessing drug paraphernalia.

Because the attorneys representing Van Dam and Sabu were granted continuances on July 6 and their future court dates haven't been scheduled yet, it's hard to say

what penalties the former ECW tag champs will receive from a legal standpoint. The damage done to Van Dam's current status in WWE/ECW is clearer, however.

While Sabu, who recently left TNA to join the WWE-owned ECW, received only a \$1,000 fine, Van Dam was suspended for 30 days without pay. But there were two little things that RVD did before heading home for his unexpected vacation.

On Monday, July 3, Van Dam dropped the Raw World title to Edge in a three-way match also involving John Cena. On Tuesday, July 4, Paul Heyman double-crossed RVD, causing him to lose the ECW title to The Big Show.

For the 20 glorious days of Van Dam's dual title run, the most pressing question was whether RVD would sacrifice the Raw World championship in order to commit himself to the ECW belt. After Van Dam and Sabu were stopped in Hanging Rock, Ohio, there was a new question: Would RVD be trusted to represent WWE—or ECW—ever again?

Believe it or not, I don't think this bit of legal trouble will harm Van Dam's career in the least. Van Dam was bound to lose the Raw World title sooner rather than later, primarily

because WWE Creative was determined to continue the Edge-Cena feud without RVD in the mix. RVD's Raw World title reign was merely the precursor to ECW's re-activation of its own heavy-weight championship. Because Van Dam placed the Raw and ECW titles on equal par, the ECW heavy-weight belt gained much-needed credibility.

Whether Van Dam had been stopped by the Ohio State Police or not, he was going to be the face of ECW, not Raw. And what do you call a wrestler with a track record of marijuana use and reckless behavior? The perfect ECW champion!

In light of Eddie Guerrero's death, the McMahons and other WWE executives are serious about their recently introduced drug poli-



After allegedly being caught in the possession of marijuana alongside ECW comrade Sabu, Rob Van Dam faced two days in Philadelphia dealing with the consequences of his mistake. WWE hit him with a 30-day suspension, and it's too early to say what Ohio's punishment will be if convicted.

cy. The WWE Wellness Program's policy states that the "non-medical use and associated abuse of prescription medications and performance-enhancing drugs, as well as the use, possession, and/or distribution of illegal drugs by WWE talent is unacceptable and prohibited." The program doesn't test for marijuana unless there is "reasonable cause" to do so.

If Van Dam is found guilty of the possession charges, I sincerely hope that WWE considers that "reasonable cause" to administer marijuana-detection tests to RVD in the future. I thought that Van Dam's explicit comments about marijuana use in *High Times* magazine (and the "4:20" graphic on his tights!) might have given execs a reason to believe that RVD might indulge in such a pastime.

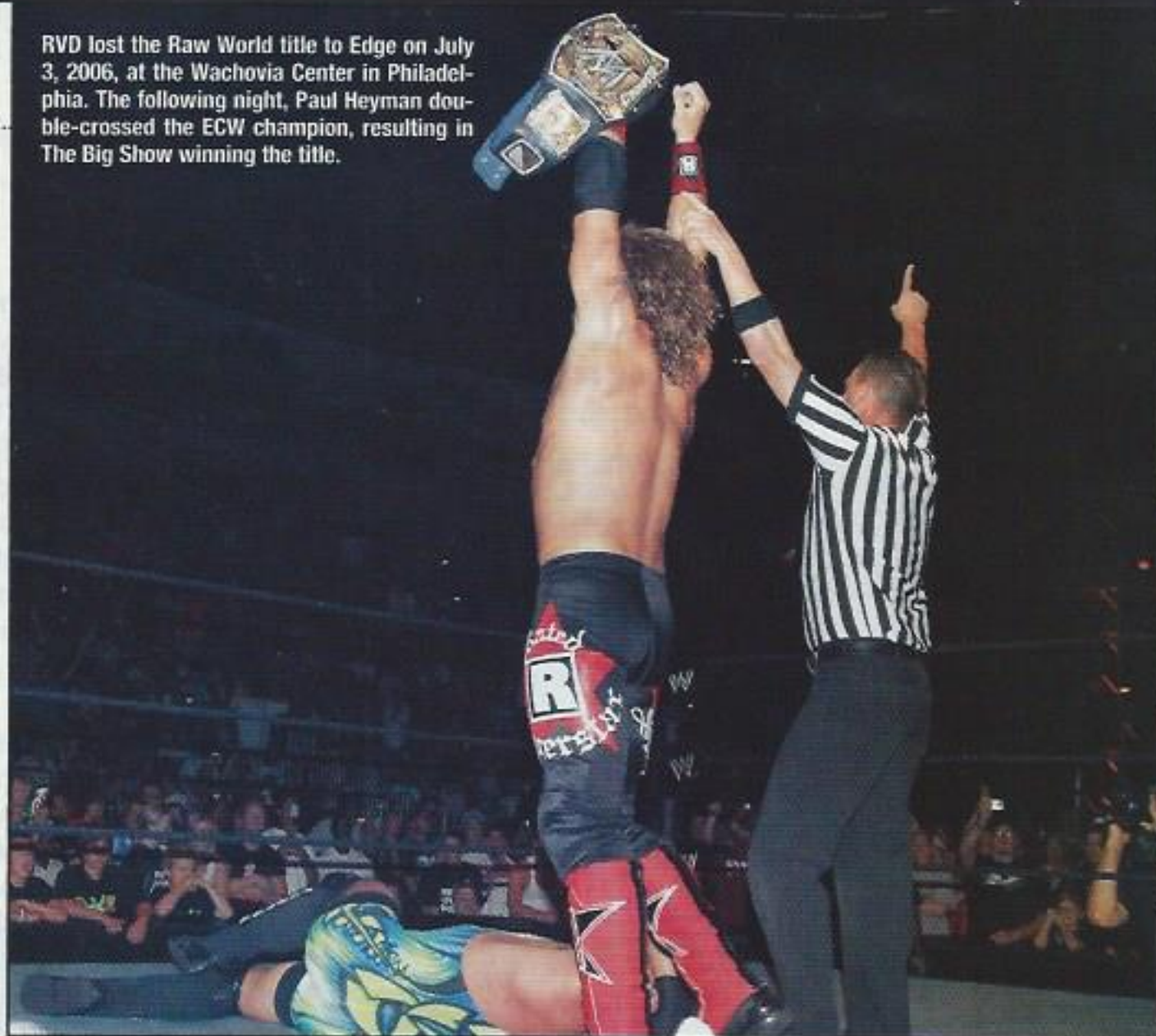
On the other hand, Van Dam's scrape with the law and alleged marijuana use reinforces ECW's image as an underground alternative—an image the brand has tried vainly to project since its weekly television show premiered on June 13. Van Dam and Sabu certainly don't come across as corporate pansies (as virtually every other WWE wrestler does) when they're riding around with doobies. I wouldn't be surprised if Heyman and Creative push RVD and Sabu as a permanent team after this incident.

By portraying Van Dam's legal problems as a potential positive, I am not condoning his behavior. If Van Dam was actually using marijuana, he betrayed the entire WWE roster with his selfish actions. And, if Van Dam is using the stuff on a regular basis, he'll have a hard time having a coherent conversation by the time he's 50.

But WWE hasn't been in the business of promoting responsible social behavior for a long time. WWE Creative is the same entity that had Steve Austin give Stephanie McMahon a "Stone-Cold" stunner despite his real-life arrest for domestic violence. In fact, the entire "Attitude" era promoted bad behavior, from middle fingers and chants of "suck it," to the "ho train" and "puppies." While I believe there's a certain level of concern for Van Dam's health and lifestyle, I don't think WWE is above turning this well-publicized incident into fodder for an ECW angle.

After all, it isn't 1987 anymore. The Van Dam-Sabu incident is strikingly similar to what happened to "Hack-saw" Jim Duggan and The Iron Sheik nearly 20 years

RVD lost the Raw World title to Edge on July 3, 2006, at the Wachovia Center in Philadelphia. The following night, Paul Heyman double-crossed the ECW champion, resulting in The Big Show winning the title.



ago. New Jersey police pulled over Duggan and Sheik on the Garden State Parkway. The attending officer smelled the odor of burnt marijuana and went on to find three grams of cocaine in the Sheik's shaving kit and 25 grams of marijuana in a bag belonging to Duggan.

Actually, that incident was more awkward than the current situation involving Van Dam and Sabu. Because Duggan and Sheik were supposed to be feuding, this high-profile incident was an "a-ha" moment for many fans in the kayfabe days of wrestling. The WWF suspended both men.

Once Van Dam's 30-day suspension is over, he will remain a top star in ECW—even if this hastens Creative's efforts to find someone to replace him as the brand's headliner. As his recent posting on robvandam.com suggests, he's taking all of this in stride. "Well, it's going to be difficult to think of reasons not to clean out the garage now. Looks like I have a little more time on my hands ... Hey, it looks like I'll have time to go see that *Superman* movie! Super. C U in 30."

I hope Van Dam's typical "whatever" attitude is just for the fans' consumption. For his own sake, Van Dam must consider this incident a wake-up call. Whether RVD beats these charges in a court of law is irrelevant—at least as far as his career is concerned. Arguably, this incident cost him both the Raw World and ECW heavyweight titles. The cost could be much higher next time.

His future could go up in smoke. □

ON ASSIGNMENT

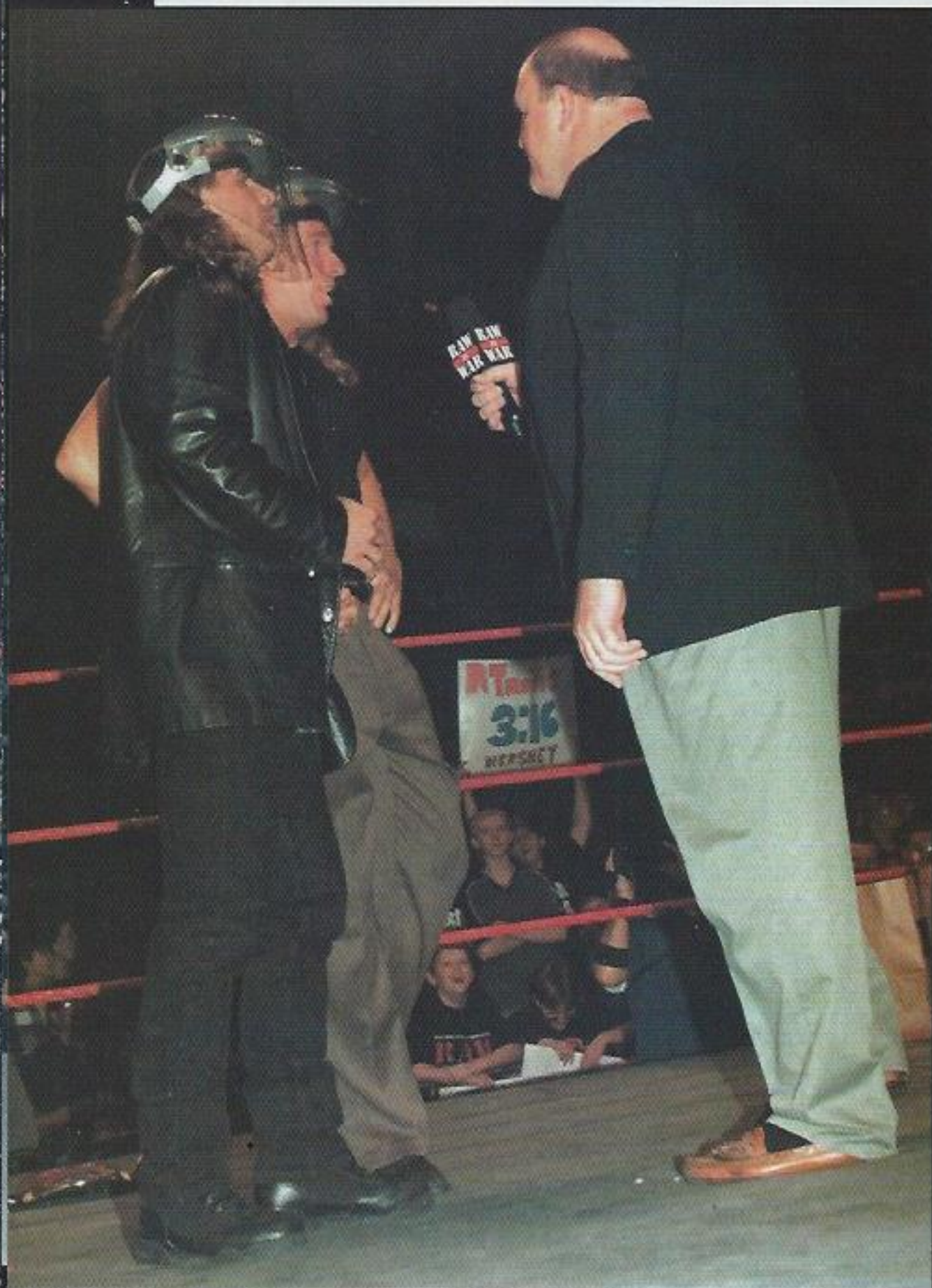
ONE OF THE many joys that comes from being in a big family is that I always got to babysit my nieces and nephews. Of course I'm being sarcastic here. My sister's kids were some of the most unruly, distasteful

little rugrats this side of the Mississippi. They never cease to amaze me with their sheer creativity. Not in the sense of drawing or building with Play-doh, mind you, but in the sense that these kids would stop at nothing to wreak havoc.

They've been known to build complex structures all for the sake of dumping water on the head of a relative. They painted the neighbor's garage door pink. They glued a horn on their dog and sold photos to the *Weekly World News*. It was just pandemonium. Babysitting them was like babysitting for 100 kids. They might as well have been given live ammo and army training. For all their imagination, they could make weapons from anything. You should see what they did with a thermos and a tube of toothpaste. Yikes—I still have nightmares.

Here's the deal, though. When they were young, it was kind of cute. They had these little smiles and shrugged shoulders each time they got caught. People let it slide because it was coming from children who didn't know better. We thought at the time that it was lucky how storeowners didn't call the cops when they took candy. We were pleased that teachers didn't throw them out of a window for their horrible "jokes." Then again, how could they? These kids were so adorable! You'd have to be a cross between Cruella Deville and Satan himself to hold anything against these two cute little faces. Awwwww! Look at those little faces! How could you get mad at them?

Then they grew up. Surprise, surprise. People didn't think they were so cute anymore. Their previous stunts did nothing to garner them any favor among the community. We had no ticker tape parades or Knights of Columbus dinners for their crimes. Nope. There were just arraignments, stores we weren't allowed in, and written apologies. How did this all affect me? Well, hey, wouldn't ya know it? Auntie Liz got to play support system the whole time. Why did I have to be the shoulder to cry on? Because my sister is an emotional wreck who raised bratty kids, that's why. Because my whole life, I've done nothing but support! I've been there for every single freakin'... uh, but I digress.



To protect their mugs from Sgt. Spittle, the old DeGeneration X sported splash guards, a joke only the most infantile jesters could pull off. The newer DX haven't been as creative to this point.

BY LIZ HUNTER ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

My young nephews, Bradley and Damien, both learned an important lesson as they exited their younger years. They learned that as you grow old, your outlook on life has to change. It's unnatural if it doesn't. Even if you move on from your adolescent ways, it's important to never go back—no matter how tempting the allure of youth is. Anyone over the age of 25 knows that. When you're 15, you can't wait to grow up. When you grow up, you wish you were 15. It's quite the quandary.

If you don't know what I'm saying, then I got two ... well, actually, one word and a letter for ya.

DeGeneration X.

Shawn Michaels and Triple-H appeared to grow up over the last 10 years. Shawn seemed to lose his hair and find God all in the same time period. While Hunter lost his long tights and found a wife in that same span. It looked like "The Game" and the "Heartbreak Kid" had both moved on from their florescent green crotch chop days. They were both adults. They were the "King Of Kings" and the "Icon" of a wrestling generation.

Well, that is until 2006 rolled around. For some reason, two men who had shown both maturity and strength over the last decade decided to regress back to their younger days. "The Boy Toy" was back to being a boy again. "The Game" was back playing his childish pranks. It was 1997 all over. Nice. Remember '97? *Ahhh*. I liked 1997. That was a good year. We were still pinching my nephews' cheeks and didn't have to go through a metal detector to visit them.

Now my sister's boys are off learning the lessons of life, while Hunter and Shawn repeat the mistakes they regretted in the first place. Sure, the fans might love them, but is this really what HBK and Triple-H want to do with them-

selves? Do they want to step backward not only in their careers, but in life? Haven't they finally transcended that juvenile quest for pranks? Weren't they ready to be grown-ups?

Sadly, no. You know what? I think I may have made a mistake here in this column today, and it didn't even dawn on me until I wrote that last paragraph. I've been comparing DX to the wrong family members this whole time. They're nothing like my sister's kids. At least those two boys are learning their lessons and are adjusting to adulthood (as soon as they get out). They're moving on and growing up.

No. Michaels and Helmsley are more like my sister's ex-husband who, at the age of 40, bought a Ferrari, got his ear pierced, and left her. He told everyone that it was his "mid-life crisis." *Hmmm*. Mid-life crisis, eh? Imagine that. A grown man acting like a kid. That would have been the better comparison for DX because, just like Hunter and Shawn, he looked pretty ridiculous, too. □



The days of the rude, crude brood that entertained WWF audiences have passed, making room for middle-aged men whose recent childish antics remind Liz Hunter of her ex-brother-in-law's mid-life crisis.

FROM BELL TO BELL



BY MIKE QUACKENBUSH ■■■■■■■■■■

(Editor's Note: Mike Quackenbush, who has held numerous titles in the United States and beyond, files reports on the life of an independent wrestler seeking to make an impact on the business. In this issue, he looks back to a time that revolutionized the industry.)

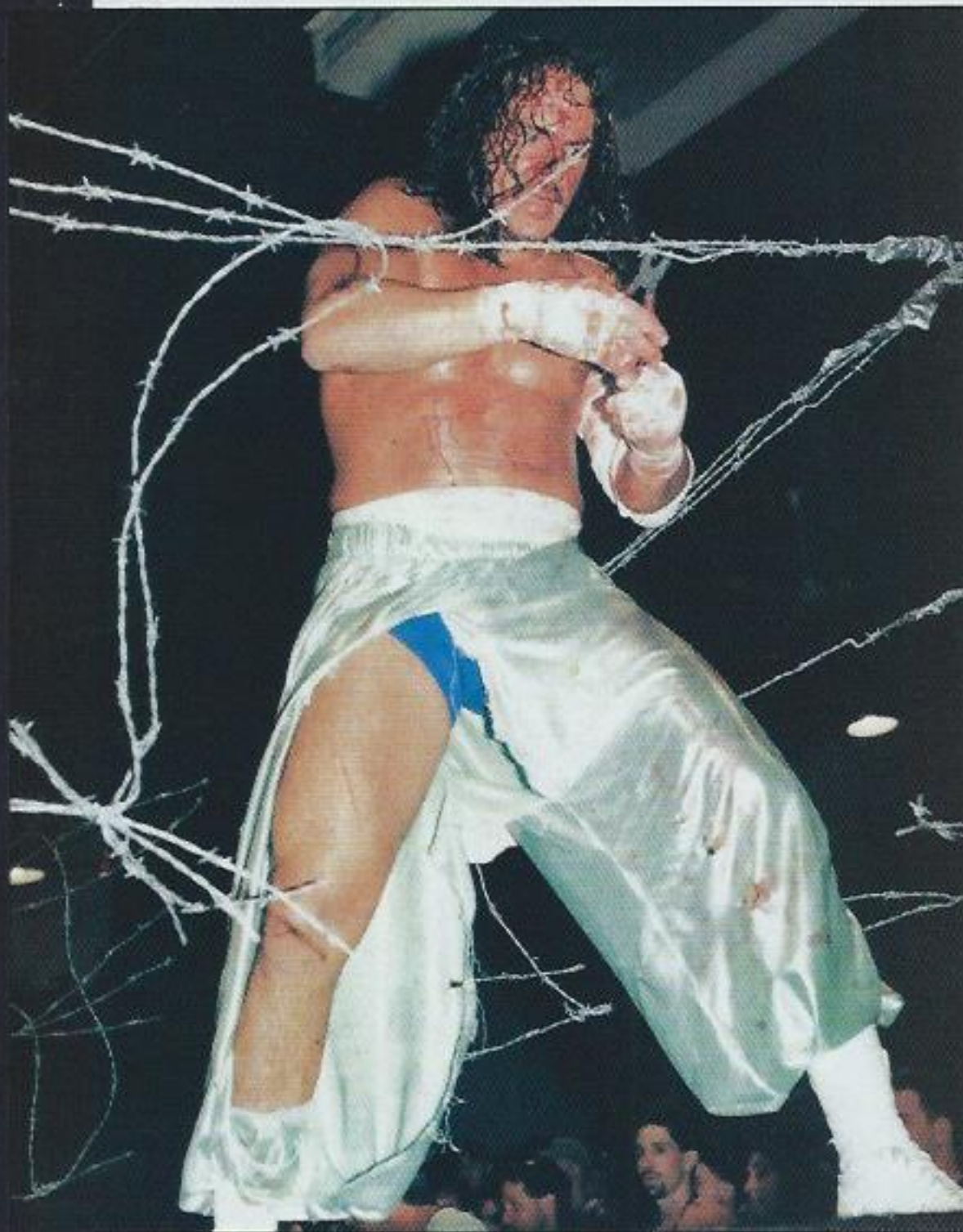
MY HOME PROMOTION, CHIKARA, formed as an independent company in early-2002, utilizing homegrown talent that trained at our Chikara Wrestle Factory. Everyone involved, from the referees and

announcers right up to the veterans of the crew, came together looking to be part of something different, something new, and something progressive. Of course, that sounds like the same rhetoric a lot of companies throw around. If you pay close enough attention, every promotion out there claims to be cutting edge, totally different, maybe even "extreme." Those kinds of words have all but lost their meaning in pro wrestling. Even a local bank in my hometown of Reading, Pennsylvania, claims to have an "extreme checking account," and if checking can be extreme, then what possible meaning is left there?

My career as an independent wrestler began in the 1990s, and shortly after I broke in, Eastern Championship Wrestling morphed into Extreme Championship Wrestling. In very little time, it came to embody a cutting edge philosophy, and proved, with every event, that "extreme" was more than just a name it had chosen for itself. ECW went on to give the wrestling world a number of innovative concepts and took other concepts, spun them in its own way, and made them popular all over again. During its initial lifespan, ECW gave us classic feuds, hair-raising stunts, and broadened what people would find to be acceptable as "pro wrestling." Its style and attitude would go on to influence a legion of independent groups for years to come, and the matches ECW produced would influence an entire generation of wrestlers, me included.

The ECW star burned brightly and intensely for a short period of time, but, in 2001, ECW expired. The video library, intellectual rights, and properties were purchased by the WWE in the wake of ECW's bankruptcy, eaten by the corporate giant that ECW seemed to oppose and contradict philosophically for years and years. The ironic final note of ECW's existence left a sour taste in the mouths of those diehard loyalists that followed the company everywhere.

A number of circumstances, including the demise of ECW, ushered in a long era of monotony in



At one time, what made ECW "extreme" was its attitude and pure disdain for all things conventional in the wrestling industry. The spirit of the original ECW still lives on—just not in the current incarnation of the promotion.

pro wrestling that I witnessed firsthand as I traveled the country in the early part of this decade. The WWE monopoly that emerged post-2001 produced, in my opinion, a homogenized, unoriginal vision of pro wrestling that was not especially engaging or creative. Evidently, some other folks felt the same way, as the giant bubble of popularity wrestling enjoyed through the Monday Night Wars and the heyday of Steve Austin and The Rock simply burst. People tuned out in record numbers, attendance sunk, and the business seemed to slip into a

depression. Depressing it was, especially for independent wrestlers, as there were fewer and fewer opportunities and roster spots to be filled in the big league(s).

It was during this time that CHIKARA took shape. At the time, it seemed to us like no one else was trying to go forward, think progressively, or advance the wrestling performance genre in any way. The truth is, others were thinking about this very thing back then, and the result has been a greater diversity in American wrestling right now than perhaps ever before. CHIKARA is hardly the only promotion that presents a product diametrically opposed to some of the stale reiterations of old ideas that seem to permeate the national scene these days. Ring of Honor, to name just one, is so successful at it that they've developed into an international touring company that plays to audiences of rabid fans wherever they go. Ring of Honor promoter Gabe Sapolsky knows a little something about striving to be different; he learned about it firsthand working behind the scenes for ECW years ago.

As I write this, it's the dead heat of summer, and ECW has been born again and has emerged as a new national brand, thanks to Vince McMahon. Of course, this isn't quite the ECW many of us remember with a warm nostalgia. This is the third touring brand of WWE, and, although there are some ECW faces to be found on their weekly Sci-Fi Channel program, the ECW that helped revolutionize American pro wrestling a decade ago died in 2001 and will never be resurrected. In-



Today's ECW is but a shell of its former self; it has taken on a more traditional, sports entertainment feel. Here, The Sandman pummels a zombie, much to the delight, and confusion, of those in attendance.

stead, we have the WWE version of ECW, which, in this day and age, might be as close as we're going to get to the original. The face of ECW is still there, even if the spirit seems utterly absent.

On June 24, 2006, WWE's ECW played at the former ECW Arena, now known as the New Alhambra. It's a building I know well, as it houses my Chikara Wrestle Factory training center. In fact, just a day after ECW was there, the finals of CHIKARA's Young Lions Cup IV were held in that same venue on the 25th of June. When we walked into the arena, the ECW set from the night before was still standing at the entranceway, untouched from the night before. I'd love to tell you that there was some magic in seeing it there or that it inspired us in some way, but that would be a stretch.

When WWE bought the last remnants of ECW during its bankruptcy proceedings, ECW, as a company, died. Some might say that the spirit of ECW was snuffed out back in 2001, but I disagree. The spirit of ECW is one of change, one of innovation, one of progress. ECW tried relentlessly to be different, and it didn't care one bit if you liked that philosophy or hated it. That's what they were, and that's what they stood for, and they never sold out... they were just plain sold. Anytime you attend a show or watch a DVD of a wrestling company that embodies that same tireless creative standard, then you are seeing the true spirit of ECW, no matter what name or banner they toil under.

□ PHOTO: JEFFREY M. HARRIS

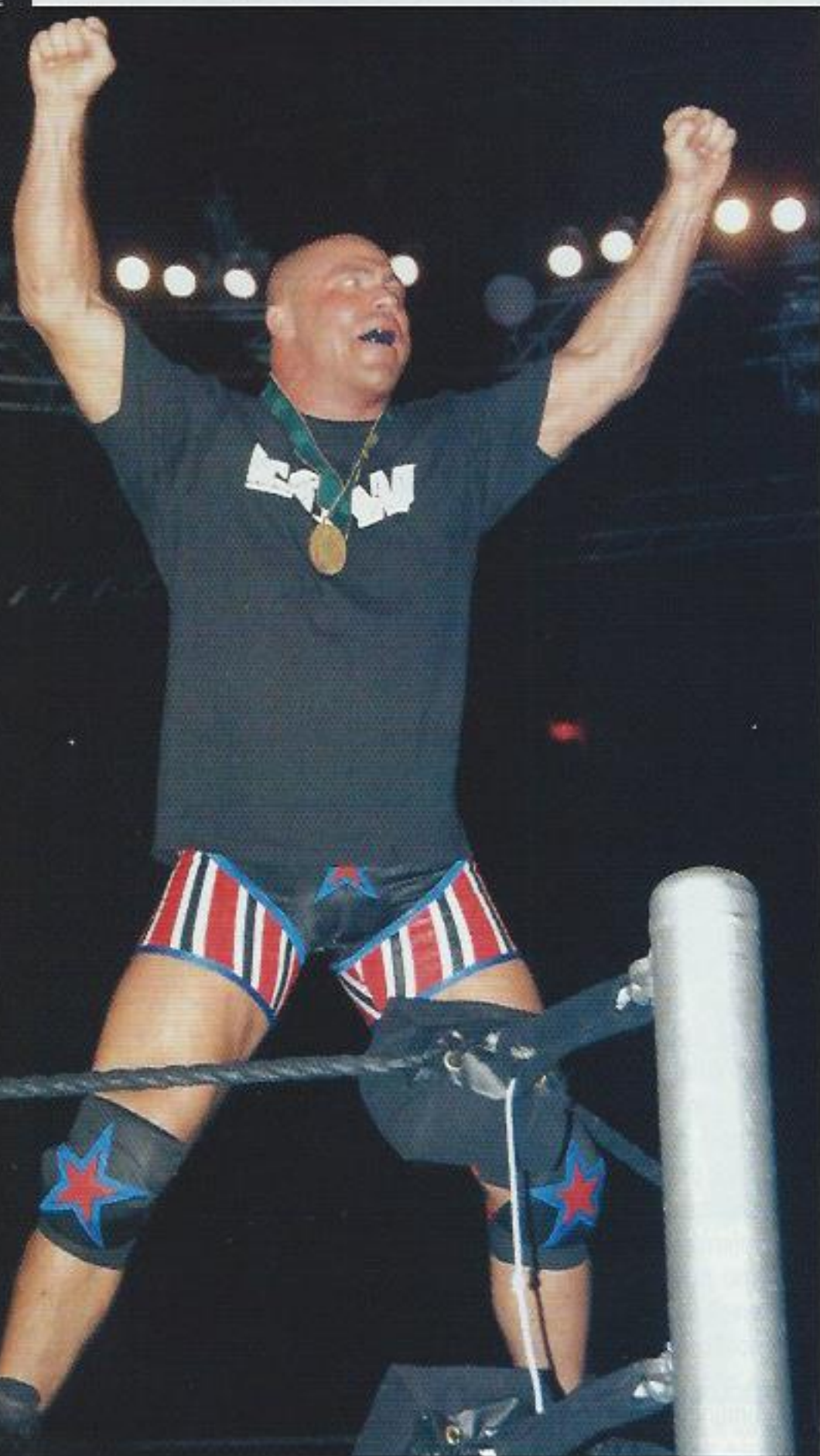
PLAIN SPEAKING

ORLANDO, FL: TNA just put a fox in charge of guarding the henhouse. If you had told me 20 years ago that Jim Cornette would be an "authority figure" in a National Wrestling Alliance-affiliated company, I would have told

you all that MTV had rotted your brain. Back in the 1980s, Cornette was one of the most despicable managers in the game. The guy even rigged the voting to win *PWF's* Manager of the Year award back in 1985. And this is the guy TNA management has handpicked to straighten things out down here? I'm willing to give Mama Cornette's little boy the benefit of the doubt for now, but I have some serious doubts. Today, Cornette handed out a rash of rulings—some good, some bad, and some outright bizarre. He demanded that LAX end their strike and start wrestling again (good), he fired Earl Hebner (very good), he dismantled Team Canada (bizarre), he signed a match between Raven and Larry Zbyszko (not so sure about this one), and he returned the NWA World title to Jeff Jarrett (very bad). Hey, TNA, want to know how to *really* fix things? Stop these multiple man matches with ridiculous stipulations, and don't bring in any more old WCW wrestlers. I'll expect my consultant contract in the mail.

CHARLOTTE, NC: So DeGeneration X is back with a "vengeance," and they're more irrelevant than ever. The focal point of this Raw brand pay-per-view wasn't the superb world title match between Edge and Rob Van Dam, or the inter-brand grudge match between Sabu and John Cena. It was the five-on-two match between two middle-aged men acting like 12-year-olds and five would-be male cheerleaders. For reasons I simply cannot understand, the fans here in Charlotte were cheering like they were watching a Flair-Steamboat classic instead of an abomination of a main event. Apparently, they find something appealing about watching Shawn Michaels stick Mitch's face into Triple-H's rear end. It's just not my cup of tea. Has anyone else noticed that the Raw World title situation is more intriguing than it has been in years, and that neither Michaels nor Triple-H is anywhere near that scene right now? Can it just be a coincidence? And has the Raw World tag team title ever been so meaningless as it is today? I guess as long as some fans find grown men dropping their pants to be funny, nothing else really matters. What a shame.

ROANOKE, VA: Kurt Angle is a man on a mission. Tonight, he faced Van Dam in a great match for the ECW title, but Van Dam scored the clean



Kurt Angle

WITH MATT BROCK ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

pinfall after a frog splash. Angle took the loss badly. He has been consumed with regaining a major title belt to the point where his professional desire is putting a strain on his family life. Worse, Angle doesn't seem to care. He is so focused on becoming a champion again—on proving all his doubters wrong. ¶“I keep hearing people say I'm not the wrestler I used to be, that all of the spinal injuries and wear-and-tear has made me less of a man than I used to be,” a visibly frustrated Angle told me in the locker room after the match. “I am the most competitive man you've ever met, Brock. I need to win a title. I need to prove I am still the true wrestling machine in this business. I need it like you need oxygen and water.” ¶Kurt, what you need is a breather. Take some time off and get some perspective. Only a fool would bet against you winning some more world titles before all is said and done. But you're not going to win anything in this state of mind.

BLUE BELL, PA: I had this space earmarked for an item from a recent Ring of Honor card in East Windsor, Connecticut, but a recent conversation with publisher Stu Saks has forced me to change my topic. The following is an actual conversation between myself and Mr. Saks, whose brain may very well be rotting because of all that MTV:

Saks: “Matt, you're going to have to make some changes to your column.”

Brock: “What's the problem, Stu?”

Saks: “Well, you refer to the Smackdown title as the World title and the Raw title as the WWE title.”

Brock: “Right, just like WWE officially does.”

Saks: “Yes, but to limit confusion, we are changing the designation of those titles in our magazines. The WWE title is now the Raw World title, and the other title is the Smackdown World title.”

Brock: “So one promotion has two World titles?”

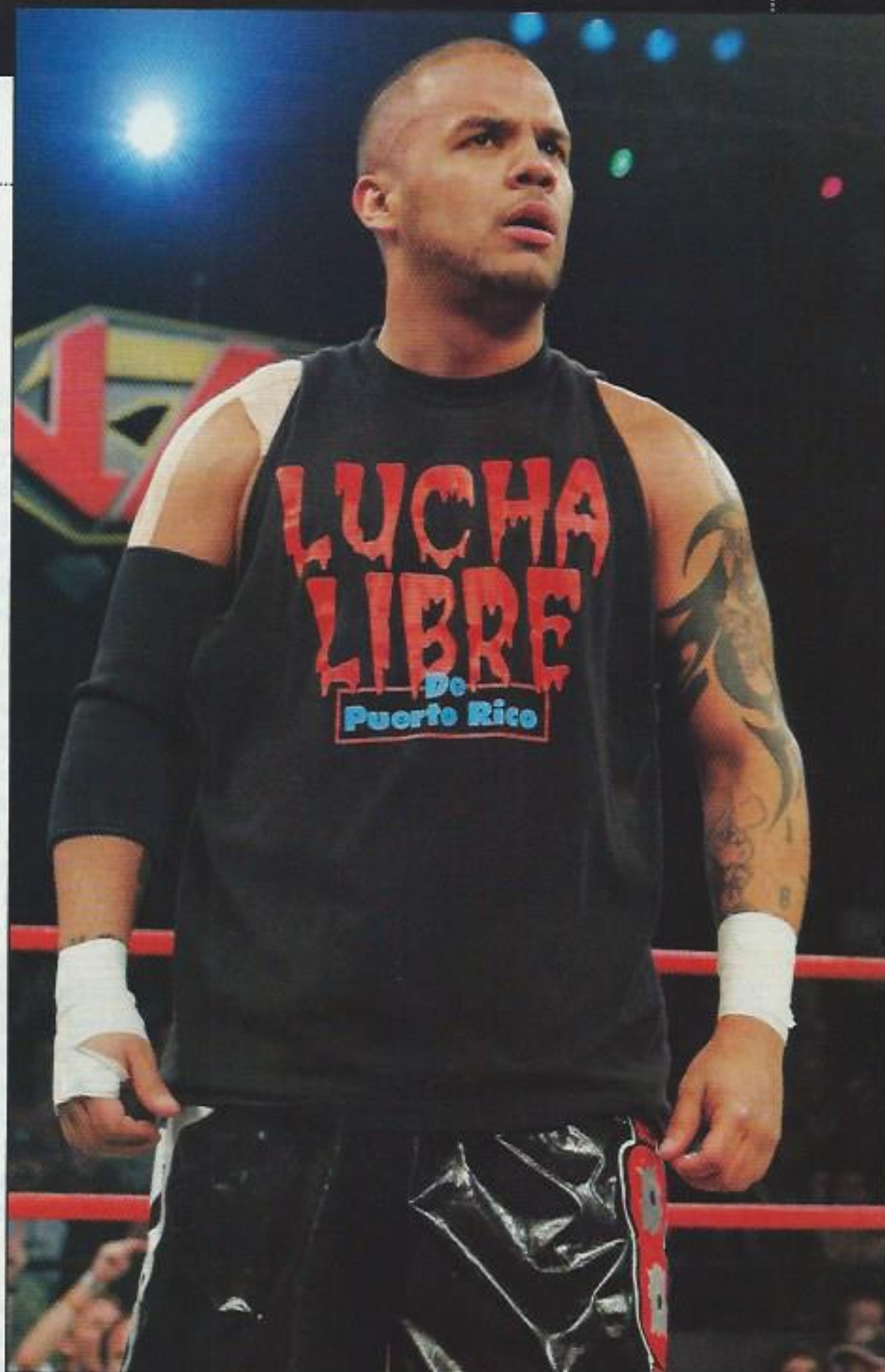
Saks: “Correct.”

Brock: “But there's still only one world, correct?”

Saks: “Well, there's one planet Earth, Matt, but WWE recognizes two World titles.”

Brock: “No, WWE recognizes a WWE title and a World title.”

Saks: “But, to limit confusion when looking at title lineages, we are going to change our designations.”



Homicide

Brock: “But what if the Raw World champion jumps to Smackdown? And can Rob Van Dam even be considered the Raw World champion if he's on ECW?”

Saks: “Matt, just change the wording.”

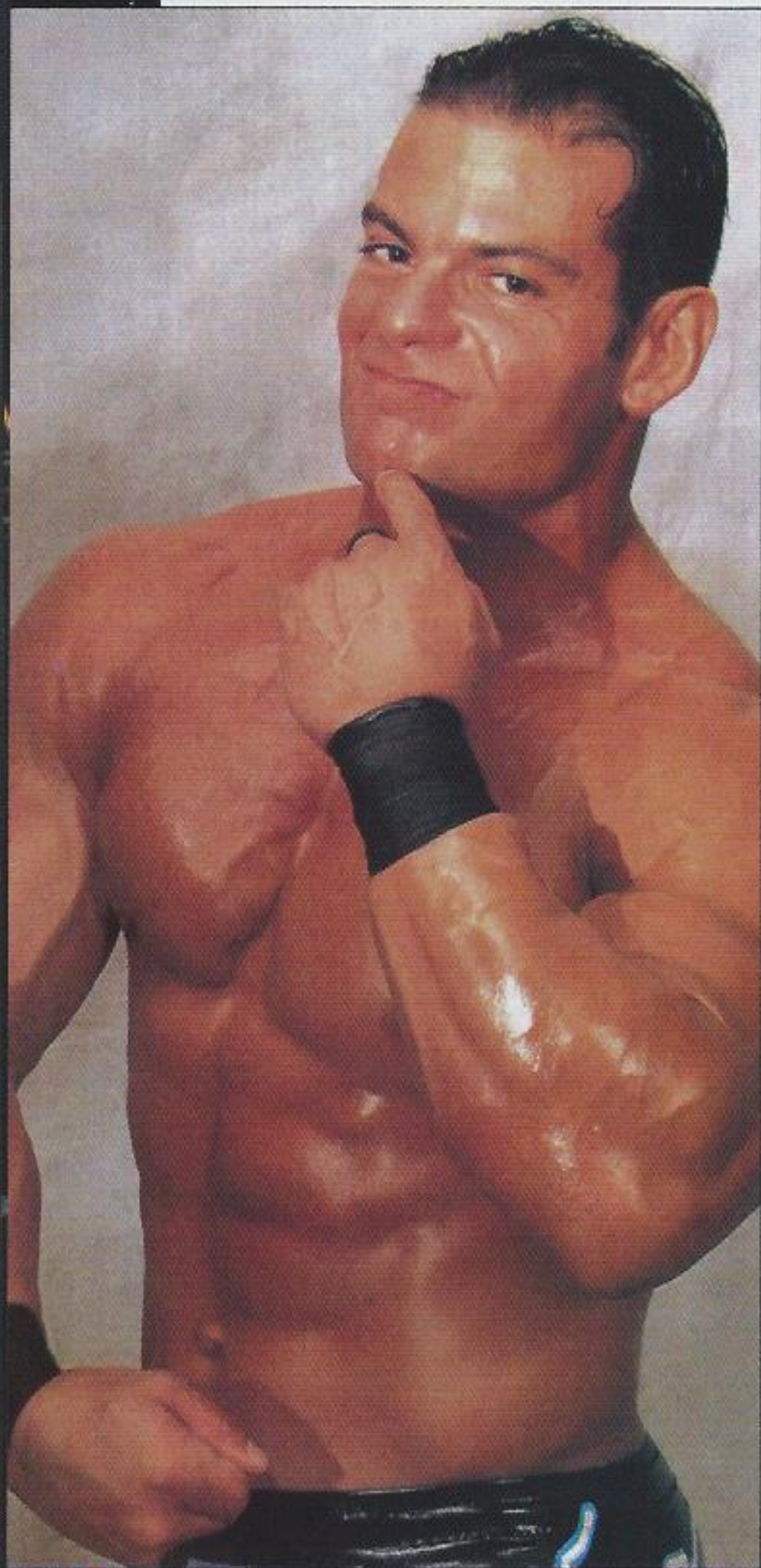
Brock: “So there's two world titles now.”

Saks: “Actually, there are three. We just decided to give the NWA title world title recognition.”

And people wonder why I drink. ¶As for the item from East Windsor, Homicide, you did the right thing by walking out of that card. ROH has been against you for a while. Concentrate on TNA and try to win that heavy-weight—excuse me, world title. *Sheesh.* □

INTRODUCING

JASON STATIC



JASON STATIC MAY not count his most visible television mainstream appearance among his most electric, but the viewers who saw Matt Hardy crash *Raw* last summer in Philadelphia for the second time in many weeks caught an inadvertent glimpse into the "Excellence Of Electrocutation." Static's debut appearance on *Raw* was not as a wrestler, but rather a police officer carrying the disgruntled Hardy from ringside.

Static—currently in his fifth year as a pro—is a regular competitor in the recently reopened Maryland Championship Wrestling. He is also one-half of the promotion's tag team champions with Scott Fowler, having beaten Danny Doring and partner Danny Jaxx to win the straps. Static has wrestled for more than 30 promotions over the years, including 13 appearances on WWE and TNA shows on his résumé. Most recently, Static was invited to participate in a match for WWE's Internet program *Heat* against Matt Striker, which he recounts as especially nice because "It was the first time I got to give some offense of my own in WWE."

Since first getting started in wrestling, Static has set two primary goals for himself. First, like so many other independent wrestlers, he is working very hard toward earning a developmental deal. "I want to convince WWE and/or TNA to put faith in me," said Static. Second, Static ultimately wants to become known as one of the best-conditioned athletes in wrestling, a lofty goal in an industry full of athletes with great physiques.

Static has his roots in the Long Island Wrestling Federation (LIWF) and the Doghouse of Queens, New York. The second, a small, now-defunct wrestling school that graduated 22 wrestlers, is best known for producing the likes of Senshi (then, Low Ki) and Homicide. He credits his trainer, the "Tower Of Torture" Laithon, with teaching him the fundamentals. "I will always be proud to say I was trained at the LIWF Doghouse by Laithon. I owe all this—my career and even my life—to Laithon," said Static. "Most of the chain wrestling I know is what I learned from him. He also basically taught me how not get myself killed."

In his earliest matches, Static wrestled under the name Jason Stryker because of a resemblance to fellow indy competitor Matt Stryker (not to be confused with WWE's Matt Striker). "I trained briefly with Johnny Rodz," said Static, "and that is where I was given the name I worked under for my first few matches." One day, he was sitting around with a friend, and they were talking about the band Static-X. "We got to thinking about it, like what exactly is 'Static'? And the thing we kept coming back to is that it meant there is electricity in the character. And I thought it sounded like a great concept to inject into a wrestling persona."

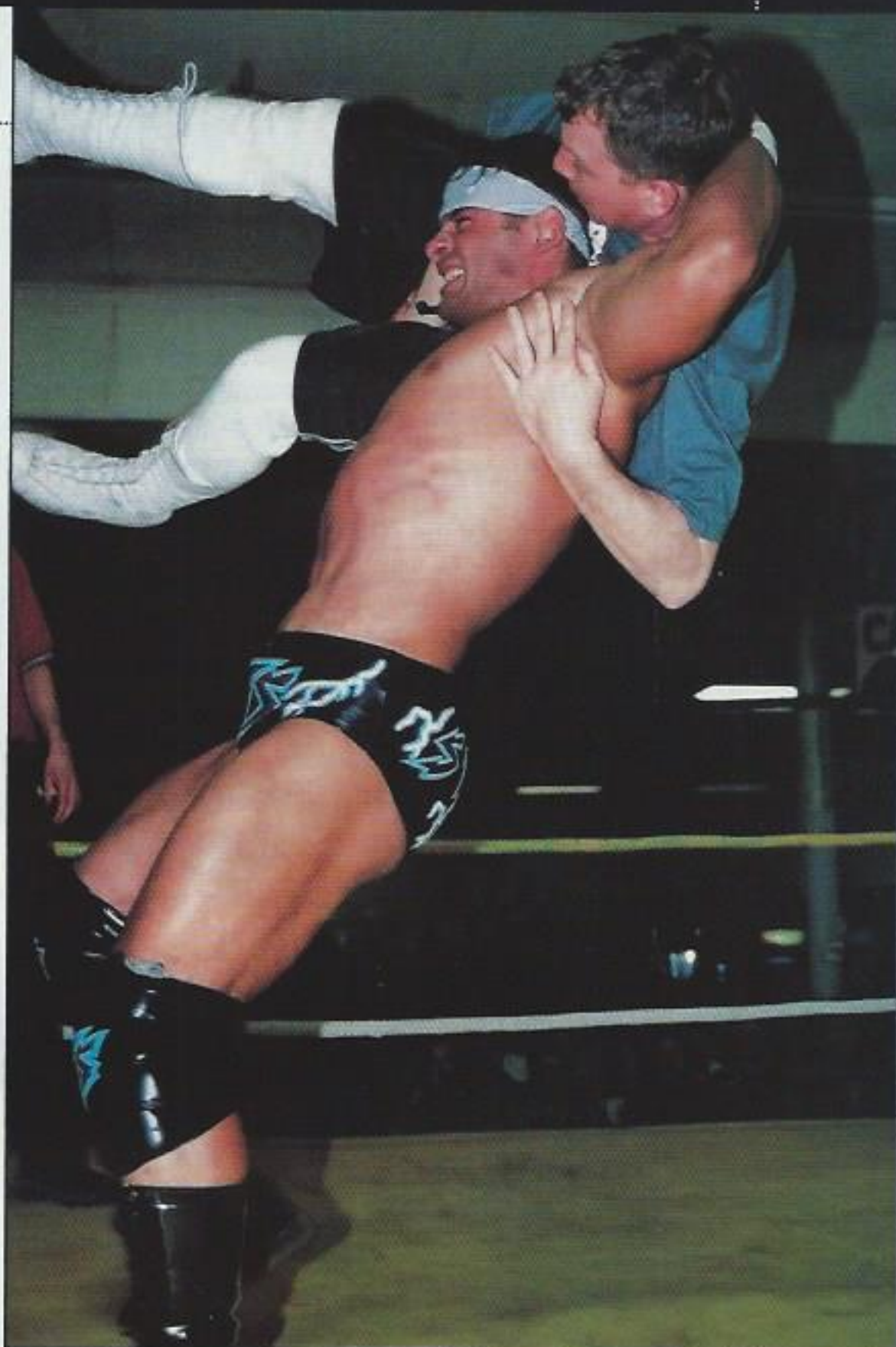
In his own words, Static describes himself as a "built up cruiserweight." He is not a heavyweight by WWE standards at 5'11"

and 203 pounds. A former natural competitive bodybuilder back in 2000 who once weighed 245 pounds, Static has done extensive weight training for more than 10 years. "My experience as a bodybuilder is an important part of who I am, and I don't want to forget that just because I'm technically a cruiserweight now. It's very important to me that I present myself as a muscular wrestler," said Static. "Nineteen months ago, I sent my tapes to Tommy Dreamer. I just wanted to see. He told me to get my diet going to streamline my physique, so I've been working very hard to do that."

Also, unlike the stereotypical cruiserweight, Static believes he is more of a technical wrestler—focused mostly on power and mat-based moves—and less of a high-flyer than is usually attributed to competitors of his weight class. Static thinks his technique could be a good complement for WWE's slower-paced, mat-based style. Comparisons to Chris Benoit, Kurt Angle, and Eddie Guerrero have humbled Static. "I'm very honored by the compliments," said Static. "I just keep trying to learn as much as I can every day so that I can improve my capabilities. Obviously, I don't have the experience quite yet, but I am trying to get closer and get better. Almost since the beginning, people have told me that I have—or could have—the right look to make it, but that I need to do a little more. So I can respect the skills that cruiserweights have, but I also need to focus on making my style my own. To work on utilizing the tools that I can as best I can."

Initially, Static focused on a power-based ground game leading up to his torture rack-face bump combination finisher. "I had to get away from that move because it was too hard to pull off," he admitted. "The problem was I could only really do the move to guys who are light, and that often prevented me from using it when I would have liked to." Now, Static finishes his matches with the "Static Shock," a hybrid Samoan pumphandle slam.

At 28, Static is looking for an opportunity to showcase his talent in more dark matches and to ultimately get the big call-up in either the WWE or TNA. In particular, Static looks to WWE's resurrection of the ECW brand as a huge opportunity. "The opening of ECW is huge because that means there is even more programming that needs to be filled," he said. "ECW means



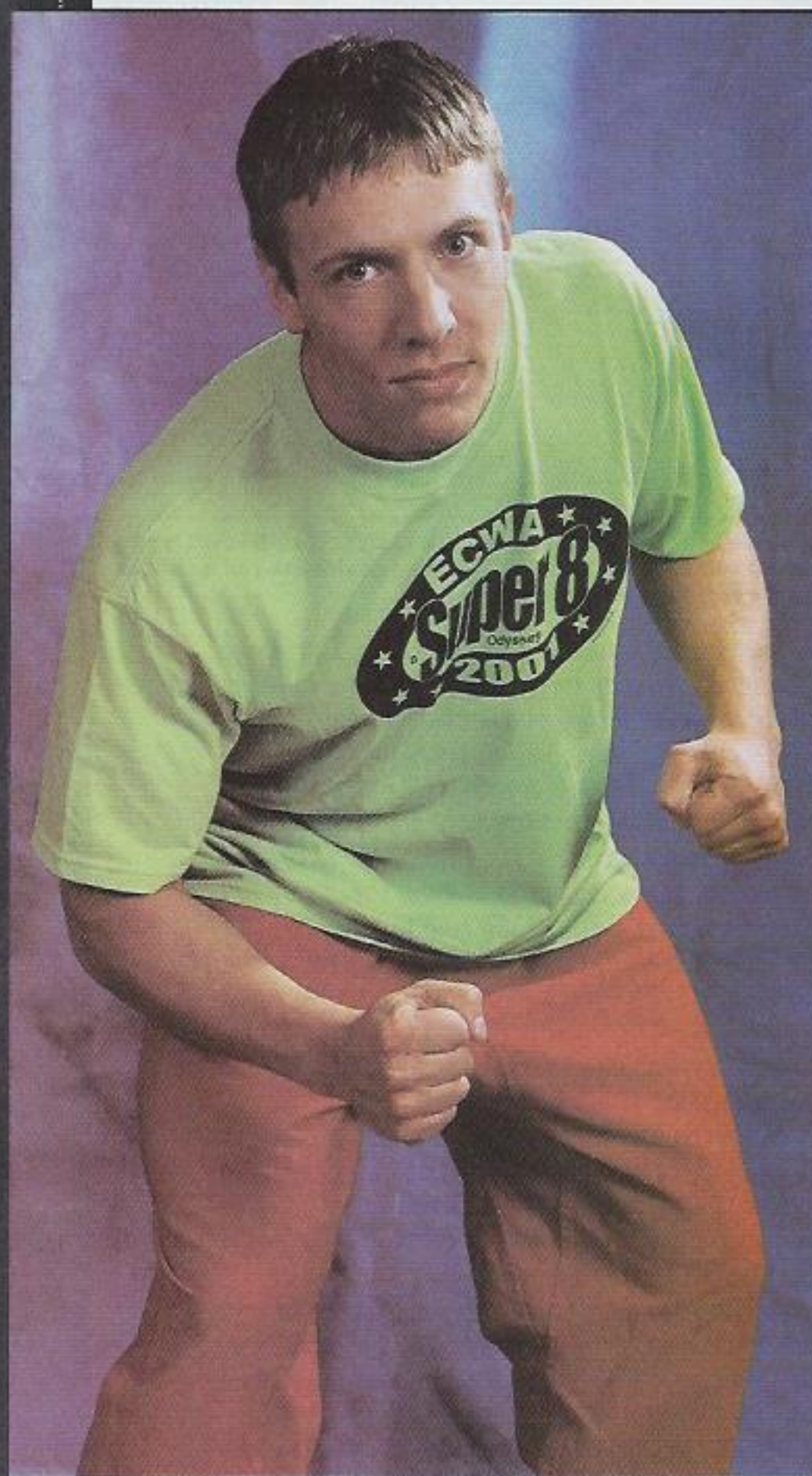
Unlike other wrestlers his size, Jason Static has adapted a more steady, strength-based ground attack as part of his arsenal. Here, he takes down Chad Bowman during a Maryland Championship Wrestling card.

more wrestlers are getting moved around between shows and new wrestlers are getting signed. This means more holes on more shows and hopefully means more guys will get signed quicker. It just means there is more of an opportunity for girls and guys, like me." □

Jason Static doesn't exactly resemble the typical cruiserweight. He takes pride in a meticulously maintained physique that could make many heavyweights jealous. What his competition would be wise to realize is that Static is even more of a perfectionist when it comes to plying his trade

SPOTLIGHT ON . . .

BRYAN DANIELSON

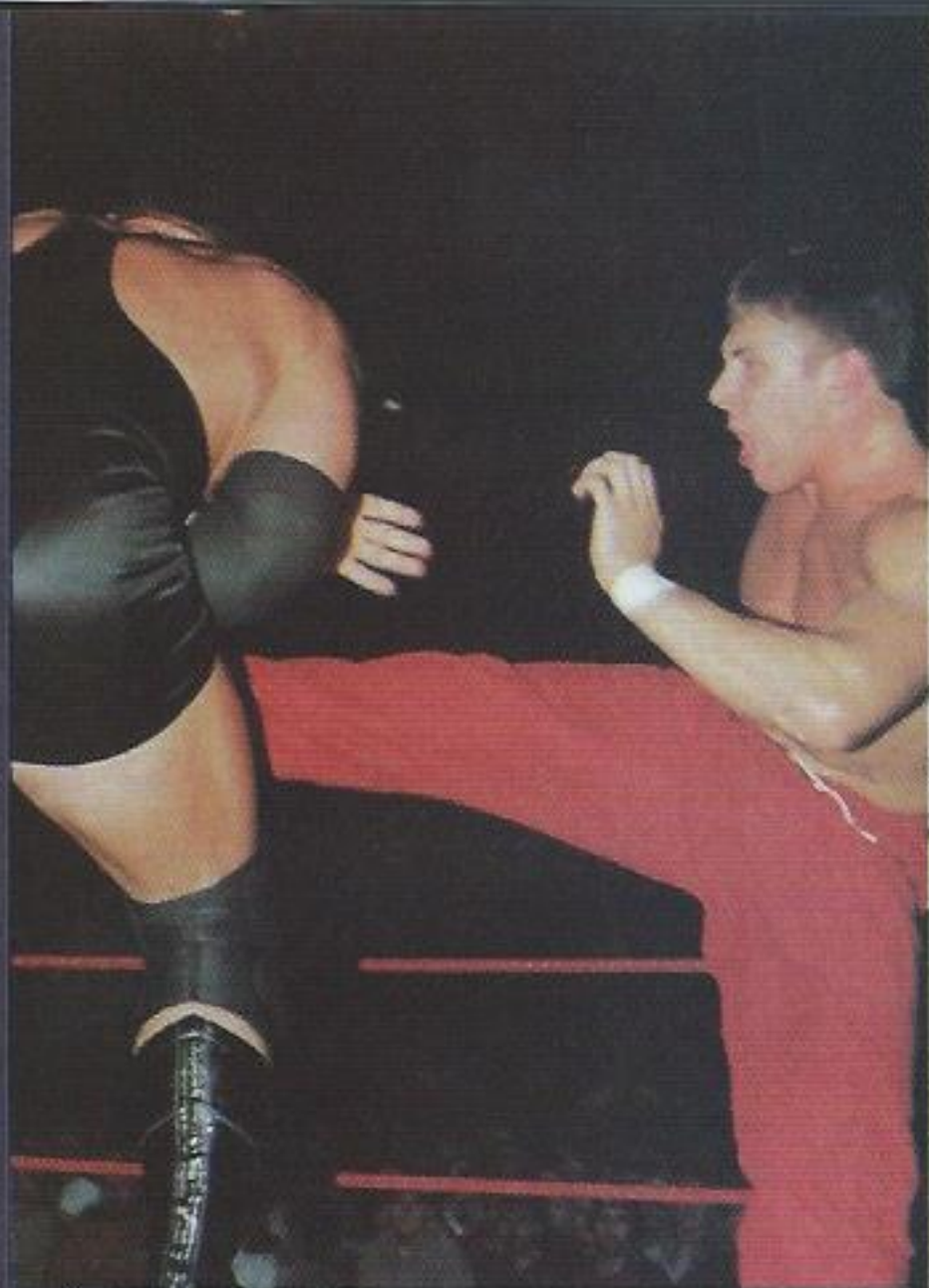


April 2001: American Dragon Bryan Danielson competes valiantly in the 2001 Super 8 Tournament held annually by the East Coast Wrestling Association. Danielson came within one win of the championship, falling to future partner—and nemesis—Low Ki in the finals.

IT TOOK BRYAN DANIELSON three years to win the Ring of Honor heavyweight title, and now the American Dragon is committed to breaking Samoa Joe's record 21-month long title reign ... Danielson was born on May 22, 1981, and grew up in Aberdeen, Washington ... Got his start in wrestling by competing in backyard matches before deciding to enroll in Shawn Michaels' Texas Wrestling Academy in San Antonio, Texas ... Trained alongside Paul London, Brian Kendrick, and Lance Cade ... Graduated from wrestling school and made his pro debut in October 1999 ... Adopted the ring name "American Dragon" and began competing for the TWA, as well as federations in Tennessee ... In December 1999, he made his first tour of Japan, competing in FMW ... That first Japanese tour was a dream come true for Danielson, who had begun to incorporate several Japanese moves into his repertoire ... On March 21, 2000, Dragon teamed with fellow TWA graduate Spanky (Kendrick) to win the TWA tag team title from Jeromy Sage and Ruben Cruz ... That summer, Danielson won his first singles championship, beating Spanky to win the vacant Memphis Championship Wrestling light heavyweight title ... Their friendship was able to survive any singles rivalry, and Spanky and Dragon teamed again, this time to win the MCW tag team title in December 2000 ... Danielson established himself as one of the hottest prospects on the independent circuit in 2001, starting with his win over Chance Beckett for the NWA Canadian junior heavyweight title in January in British Columbia ... Followed that up with a tour of the East Coast Wrestling Association, competing in the 2001 Super 8 Tournament in April ... Teamed with Low Ki to win the ECWA tag title in April 2001, beating the Russ and Charlie Haas for the belts ... But Low Ki and Danielson simply could not get along as partners ... When they beat Christopher Daniels and Xavier, Low Ki—who had made the winning pinfall—was allowed to select a new partner ... Low Ki chose Xavier ... In October 2001, Dragon scored the biggest win of his career to that point by winning the prestigious APW King of the Indies tournament, scoring victories over Spanky, Doug Williams, Donovan Morgan, and Low Ki ... In February 2002, took part in Ring of Honor's first card, facing Low Ki and Christopher Daniels in a three-way match in the main event ... Low Ki won that memorable match ... In April 2002, Danielson made plenty of enemies in ROH when he and Spanky declared they would eventually win the ROH title ... Made another tour of Japan, in the fall of 2002, this

BRYAN DANIELSON





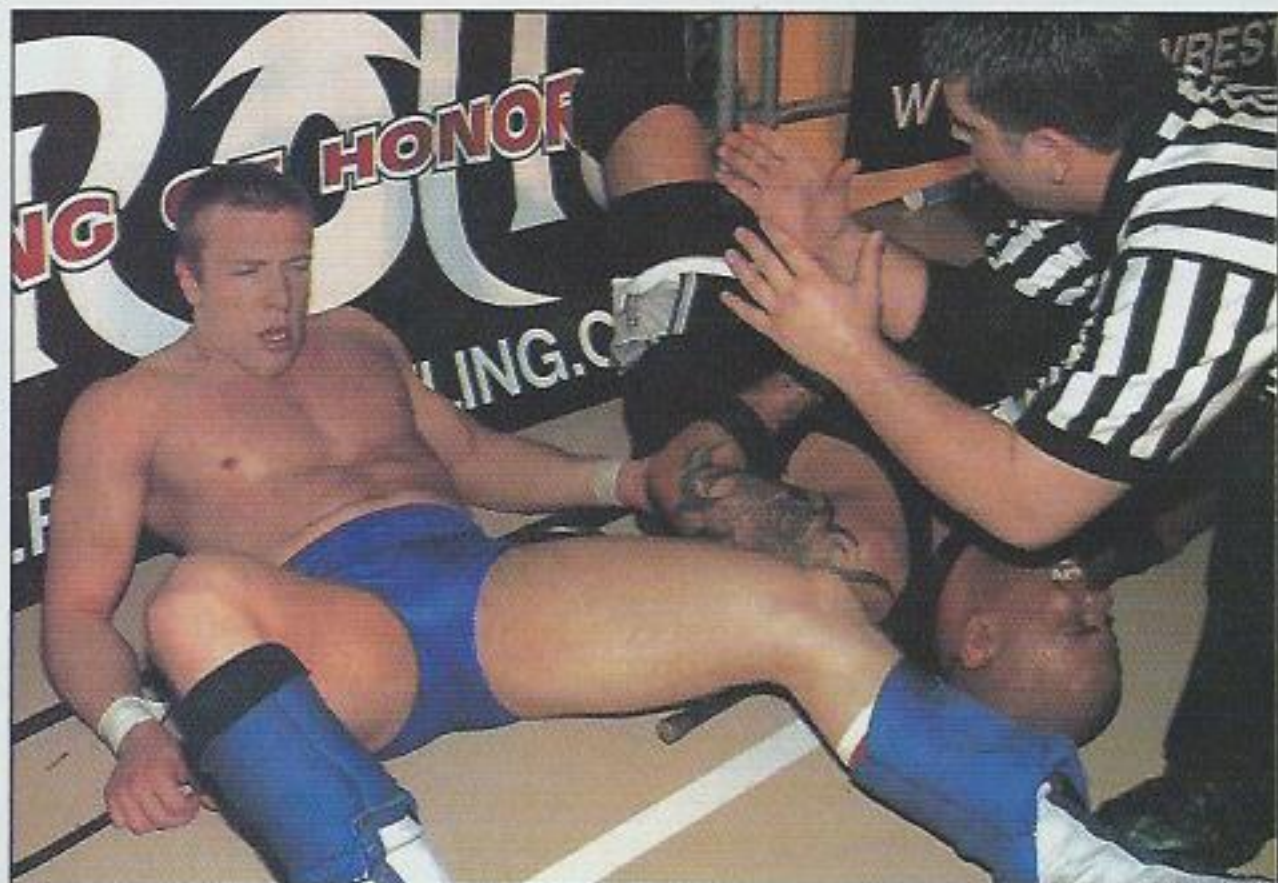
December 2002: Danielson's performance on the indy circuit following his graduation from Shawn Michaels' wrestling school was so impressive that WWE signed him to a developmental contract. He would stay with the promotion for nearly two years.



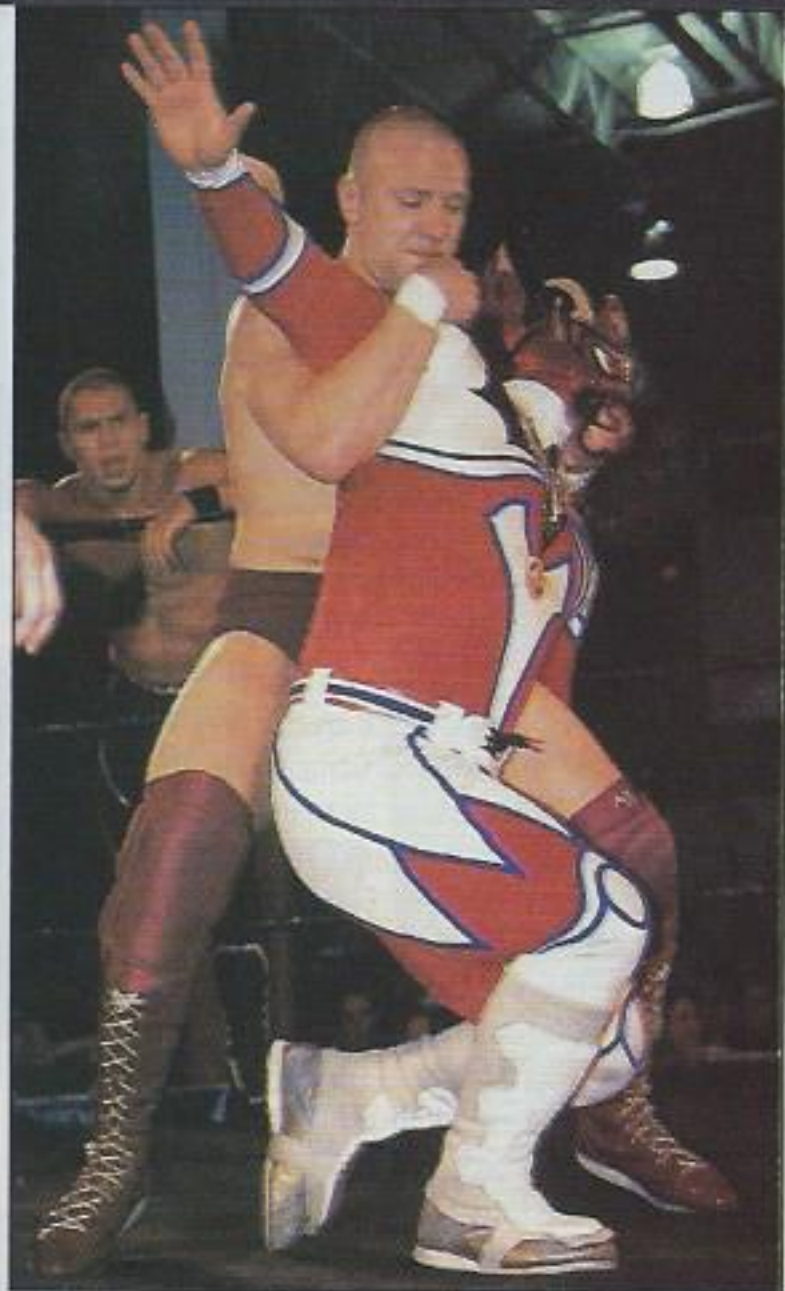
April 2004: Two of the top wrestlers on the U.S. independent circuit squared off when Danielson defeated C.M. Punk in a match for Ring of Honor, with Hall of Famer Rick Steamboat serving as referee.

time competing for New Japan Pro Wrestling ... Defeated the renowned El Samurai ... Caught the eye of the WWE talent department and was signed to a developmental contract in December 2002 ... Began wrestling in WWE dark matches in January 2003 and appeared on *Velocity* in losses to Jamie Noble and John Cena ... Perhaps buoyed by his WWE experience, Danielson defeated Samoa Joe in a critically lauded match at ROH's first anniversary show ... Launched tours of Japan and the United Kingdom ... While in England, won the All Star Wrestling heavy middleweight championship ... Wrestled several more WWE dark matches in the fall of 2004, but was eventually released from his developmental contract

... Began to concentrate mostly on ROH and New Japan ... In March 2004, he teamed with Curry Man (Christopher Daniels) to win the New Japan IWGP tag title ... The following month, scored a big win over C.M. Punk, with Rick



April 2004: On the heels of defeating Punk, Danielson encountered another obstacle on his quest for the ROH title—specifically, a best-of-five series with Homicide. Though Danielson would lose the series, it was only a temporary setback.

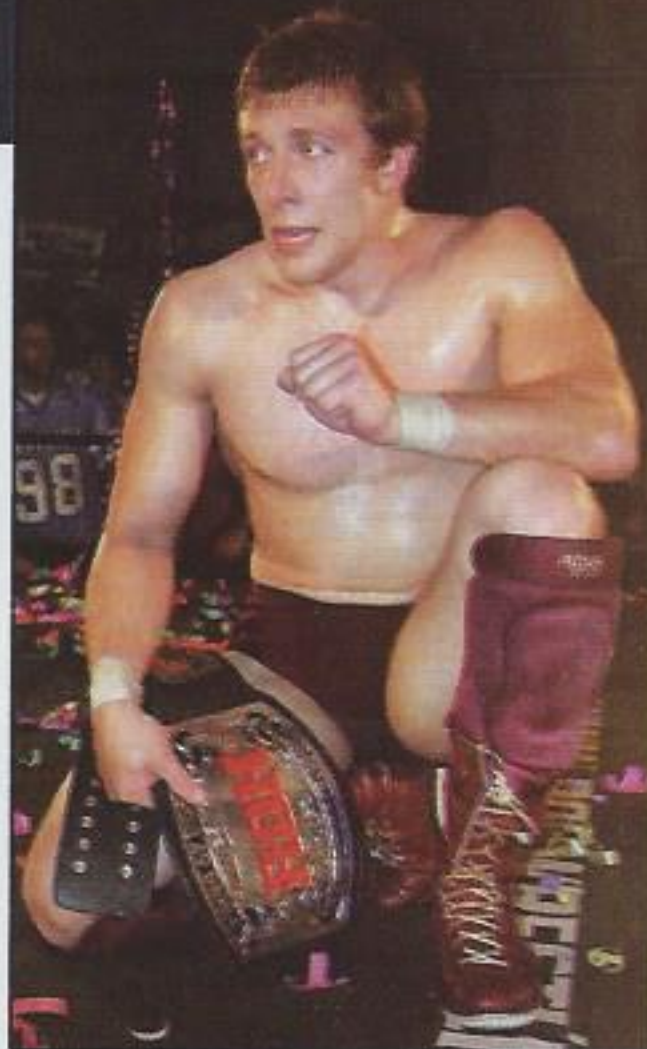


November 2004: Danielson's desire to capture the ROH title had him chasing then-champion Samoa Joe whenever possible. Dragon went as far as to reunite with Low Ki in order to take on Joe and surprise partner Jushin Liger (above).

Steamboat serving as special guest referee ... Won a Best of the Super Juniors U.S. tournament in Santa Monica, California, beating X-Pac, Chad Collyer, and Rocky Romero ... He and Curry Man dropped the IWGP belts back to Gedo and Jado in June 2004 ... That same month, Danielson won a six-man elimination "Survival Of The Fittest" match in ROH, beating Colt Cabana, Samoa Joe, Mark Briscoe, Homicide, and Austin Aries ... Displayed his incredible stamina in a 80-plus-minute best-of-three-falls match against Aries, which Aries ultimately won ... Made it to the finals of the 2004 Ted Petty Invitational Tournament in IWA-

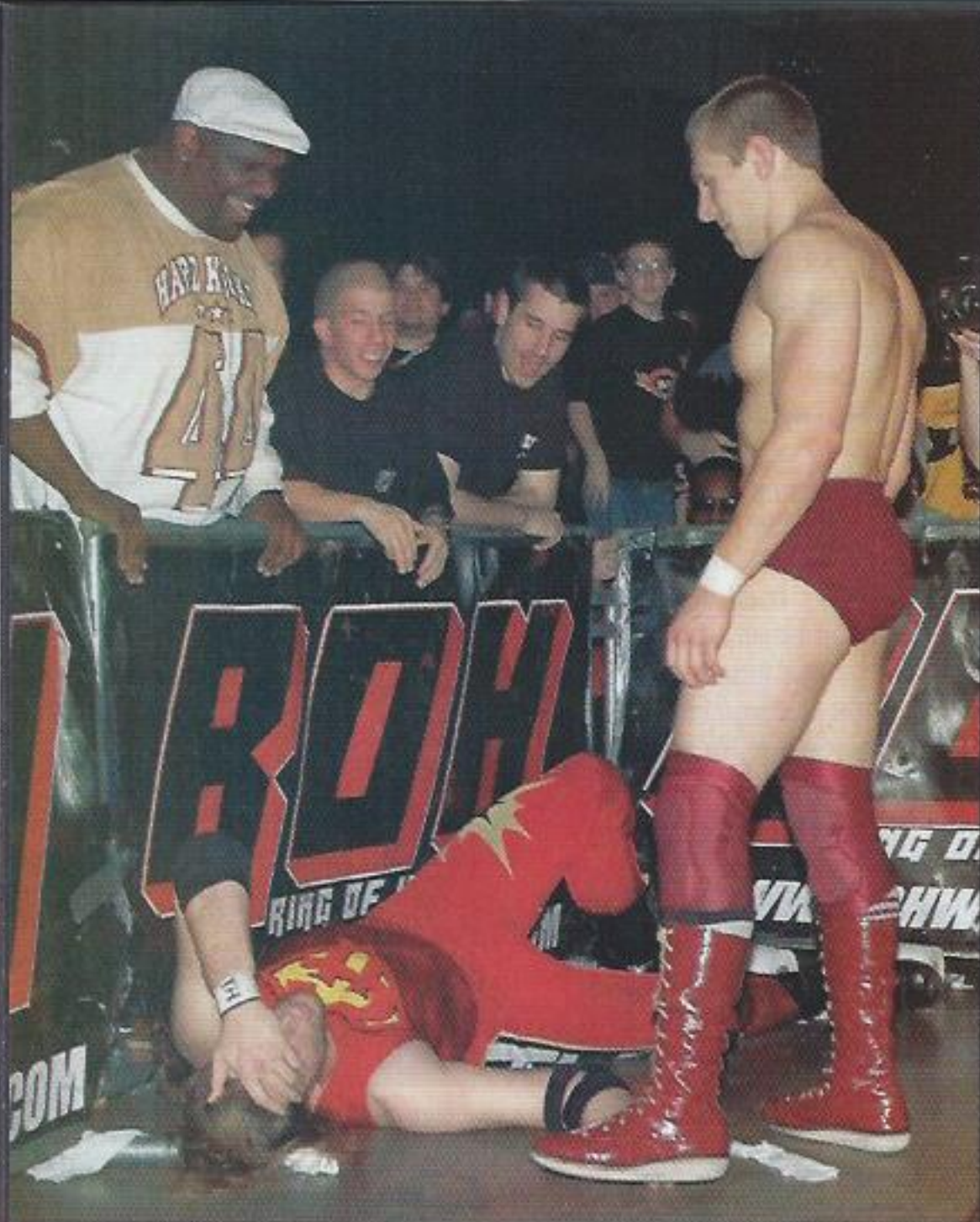
Mid South, beating Alex Shelley, C.M. Punk, and Mike Quackenbush ... However, Danielson succumbed to tourney winner A.J. Styles in a three-way final that included Samoa Joe ... Though he won numerous championships throughout his career, Danielson still coveted the ROH championship more than any other ... In October 2004, Danielson got a shot at Samoa Joe's belt, only to lose by submission ...

September 2005: Danielson's return to wrestling may not have shocked anyone more than Gibson, whom American Dragon defeated for the ROH title.



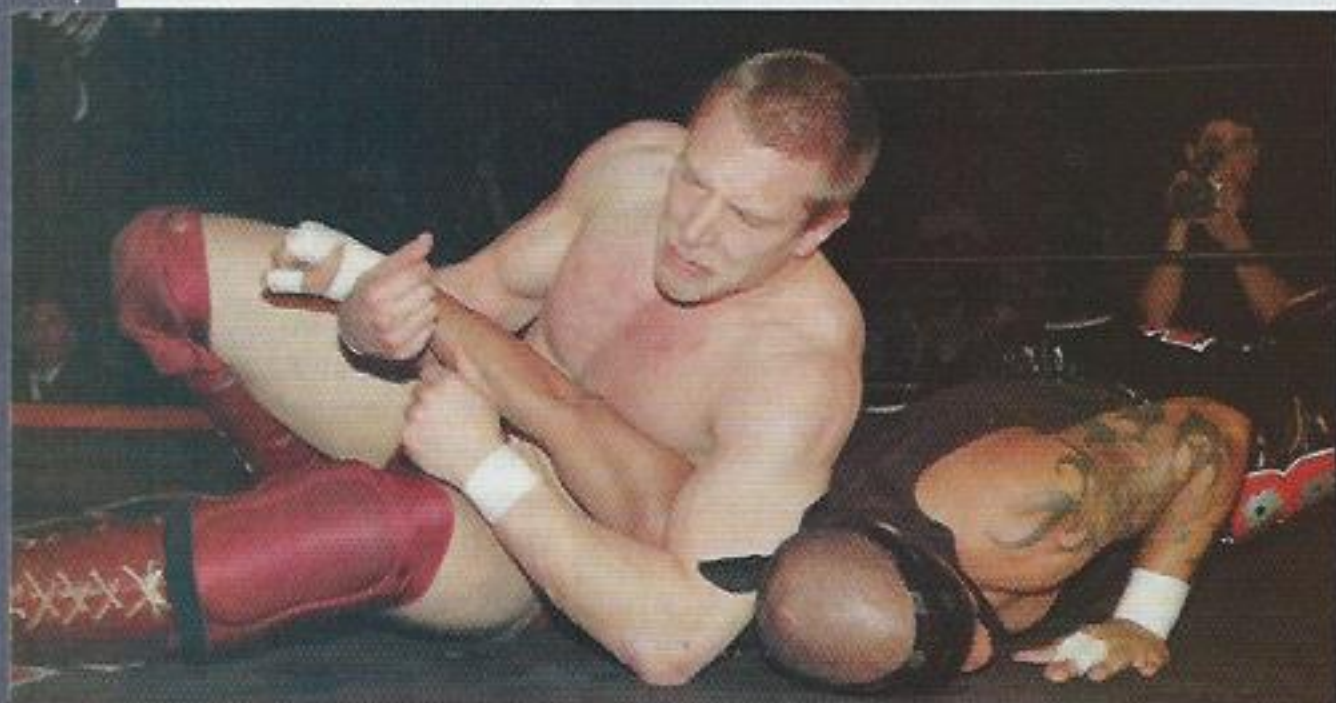
April 2005: In one of his final matches before a self-imposed exile from the ring, Danielson defeated James Gibson—the man who would become ROH champion during American Dragon's absence from wrestling—during a Pro Wrestling Guerilla card.

When Jushin "Thunder" Liger made a rare U.S. tour for ROH, he faced American Dragon on two consecutive nights ... Danielson lost a singles match to Liger and then lost a tag team match as he and Low Ki were beaten by Liger and Samoa Joe ... Before he was able to make another run at Joe's title, Danielson was sidetracked into an intense feud with Homicide that saw both men agree to a best-of-five series ... Surprisingly, the

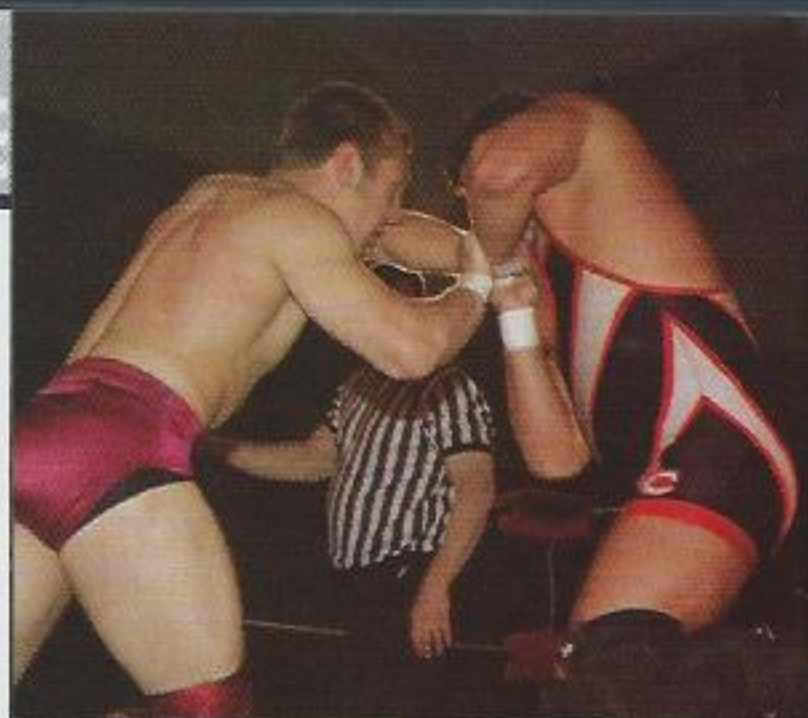


January 2006: Danielson was on the front lines of the war between ROH and cross-town rival Combat Zone Wrestling. As the face of ROH, Danielson was expected to defend the honor of the promotion against the best CZW had to offer. American Dragon did not disappoint, as he defeated CZW's Chris Hero.

brawling Homicide outwrestled the technical master, beating Danielson in a submissions match in January 2005 ... Homicide also beat Danielson in a "Taped Fist" match, but Danielson came back to beat Homicide in a "falls-count-



February 2006: When Homicide challenged Danielson for the title, he found a champion who was far better than when they had their series two years earlier. Danielson was not only at his physical best, but he was brimming with confidence.



April 2006: Colt Cabana is the latest in a long line of challengers who tries—and fails—to separate Danielson from the title. A true fighting champion, Danielson was poised to reach the one-year mark as the titleholder.

anywhere" match, a lumberjack match, and a steel cage match to win the series, 3-2 ... Competed in ROH's Best Of The American Super Juniors tournament in April 2005, beating Spanky in the first round before falling to Black Tiger in the second round ... Earned another shot at the ROH title in May 2005 but was pinned by Aries ... Three days after that match, ROH announced that Danielson had quit ROH in frustration and rumors circulated that he was contemplating retirement ... On September 17, 2005, Danielson made a stunning return to ROH and finally achieved his biggest goal, defeating James Gibson in Lake Grove, New York, to win the ROH heavyweight title ... Established himself as a fighting champion during the fall of 2005, successfully defending the belt against Aries, Steve Corino, Roderick Strong, Chris Sabin, and Daniels ... Showed his versatility by using a wide variety of finishing moves ... Defended the honor of ROH—and the promotion's reputation—against Combat Zone Wrestling invader Chris Hero ... Beat old enemy Homicide and Strong in January 2006 to win the Full Impact Pro title ... In February, Danielson entered a brief but bitter feud with rival Homicide

before dealing with The Embassy, who attempted to buy the ROH title from the Dragon ... On April 1, Danielson successfully defended the ROH title against one of his personal heroes, Lance Storm, who came out of retirement for the match ... The following month, he was able to face then-NWA World champion Christian Cage in a tag team affair, teaming with Daniels in a losing effort against Cage and Colt Cabana ... After successful title defenses against Cabana, Claudio Castagnoli, and Delirious, Danielson is nearing his first anniversary as ROH champion ... For a wrestler who was contemplating retirement 16 months ago, Danielson has emerged as a truly dominant champion. □

[Q & A]

JIM CORNETTE

IN HIS 22 years as a wrestling manager, promoter, booker, and now the managing director of TNA, Jim Cornette has rarely been at a loss for words. Thriving on controversy, the "Louisville Lip" has never been one to keep his opinions to himself. Cornette has the unique ability to simultaneously entertain and infuriate crowds. He may be many things, but no one would ever accuse him of not caring about the business.

Even before making his debut as a manager in the 1980s, Cornette worked on the periphery as a photographer, ring announcer, magazine writer, and public relations copywriter. Old school in his beliefs—but constantly evolving his "mile-a-minute" diatribes in order to keep them fresh—Cornette is one of few remaining wrestling personalities who have worked the old regional circuits of the NWA as well as the former WCW and with the McMahons. The former head of Smoky Mountain and Ohio Valley Wrestling, Cornette has primarily worked with Ring of Honor in recent years.

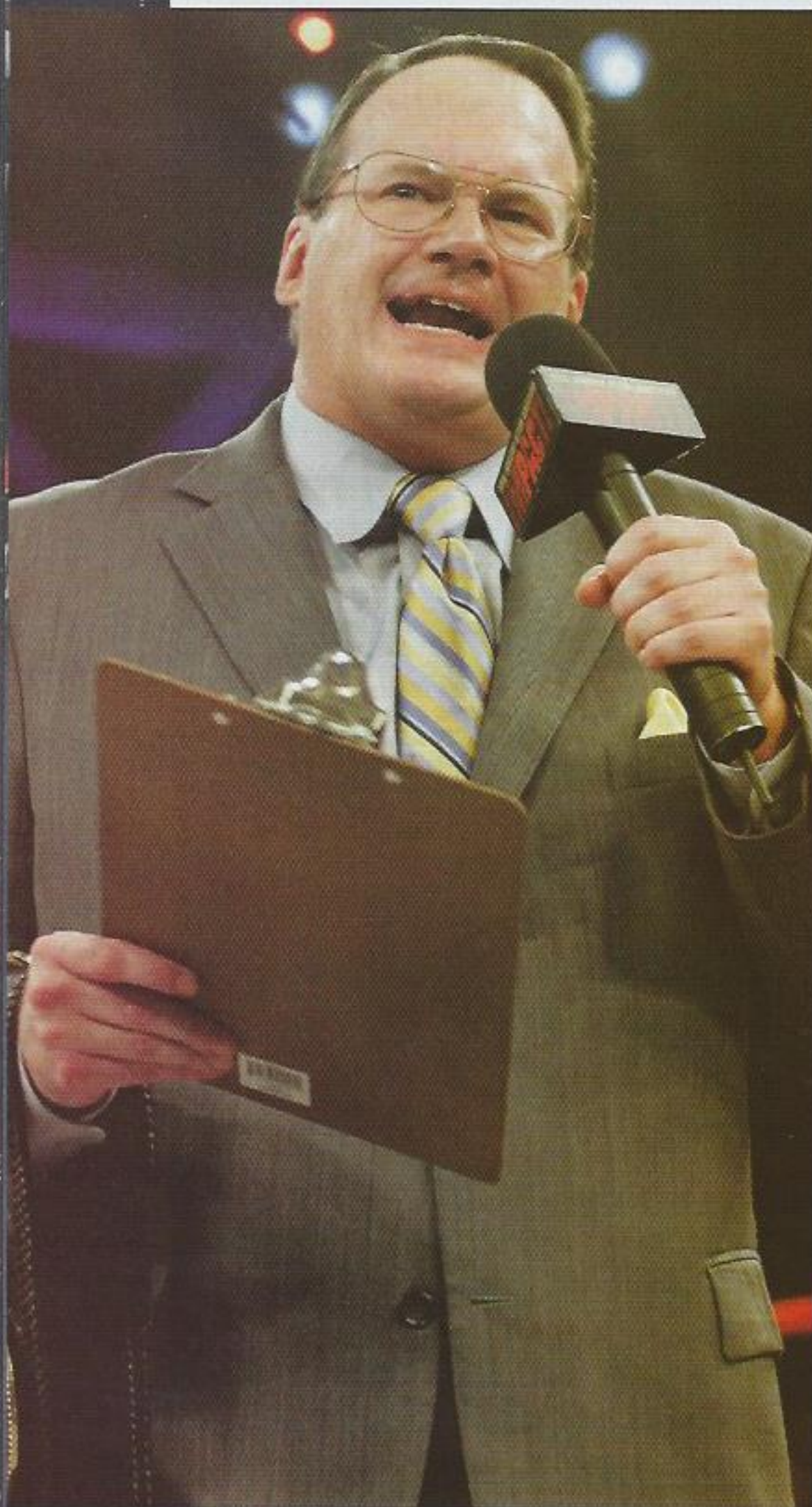
In his new role as TNA's managing director, Cornette has made an immediate impact. So far at least, Cornette has called things down the middle. And he has wasted no time exerting his authority. The most far-reaching of his edicts saw him first hold up the NWA World title after Jeff Jarrett's highly controversial victory at Slammiversary, only later seeing fit to return the strap (at least temporarily) to the self-proclaimed "King Of The Mountain."

Fans and wrestlers—heels and fan favorites alike—familiar with Cornette's antics over the years have been wary about trusting a man who has hatched some of the most devious plots the sport has ever seen. As soon as Cornette begins to speak during **Impact** segments, the reaction is decidedly mixed, and more than a tad uneasy.

Contributing Writer Bill Meltzer recently caught up with Cornette. The "Louisville Lip" was in rare form, slinging barbs at former Managing Director Larry Zbyszko, Jarrett, Team Canada, ECW, and a host of other targets. "Cornette is the easiest interview in the wrestling business," said Meltzer. "Just give him a topic, and he'll talk your ear off about it. Just as importantly, he never leaves you guessing where he stands on an issue."

Q: Jim, since you replaced Larry Zbyszko as TNA's managing director, you've been on a campaign to drive him out of TNA entirely. Do you perceive his continued presence as a threat?

A: Hardly, brother. Sky Low Low, rest his soul, could have filled Larry's shoes and still had room left over for Lord Littlebrook. Larry Zbyszko was the biggest





Jim Cornette has never been one to hide his emotions, and he is always more than willing to mix things up whenever he's been placed in a position of power, whether that be stepping into the ring (as he did in OVW on numerous occasions, right) or going toe-to-toe with fellow legend Bobby Heenan (in ROH, above).

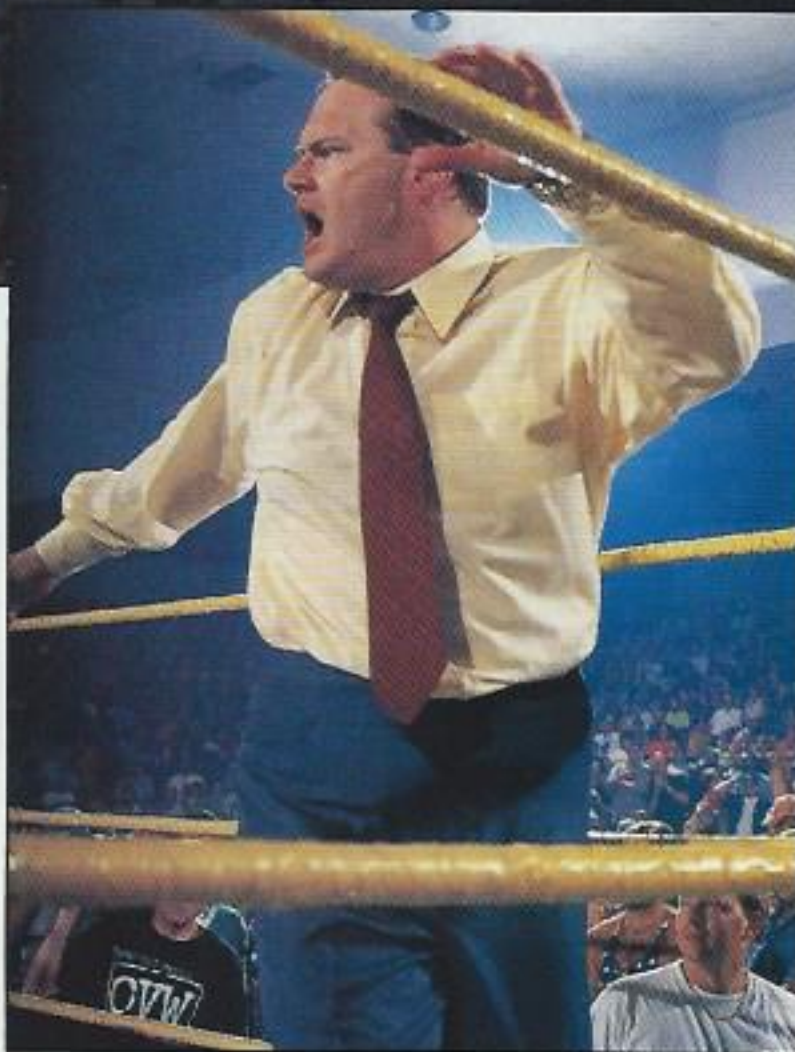
joke of a managing director I've ever seen. Larry was a career mediocre wrestler who became an even more mediocre bureaucrat. I don't want that in TNA. Larry is good at one thing and one thing only—stalling for time. Is that what anyone wants in a managing director? There ain't enough Viagra in the world to make "The Losing Legend" Larry Zbyszko anything but an impotent leader.

Q: There have been rumors that...

A: Do you mean the rumors that Zbyszko finally changed his desk calendar from August 1980? I can't personally confirm or deny it, but if it's true, I applaud Larry for doing it. It's about time. By the way, I got a message from "Killer" Tim Brooks the other day that was intended for Zbyszko's phone. Brooksie says that check for 25 grand bounced. He wants the Georgia heavyweight title back plus 23 years worth of interest on the original check. He'll be looking for you, Larry—after Raven gets done with you.

Q: In all seriousness, there have been rumors that Zbyszko is trying to line up allies to strike back at you. There are certainly candidates among the other people in TNA you've put on disciplinary notice, such as Team Canada and LAX.

A: Lemme tell you something: There's nothing Larry could cook up in his feeble old brain



that I haven't seen—and done. As far as Team Canada goes, I've made it perfectly clear: They either go their separate ways and compete one-on-one, or else I'll ship 'em all back to Goose Creek, Saskatchewan, together. It's their choice.

Q: That's Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan.

A: Whatever. I actually think I've been pretty lenient with Team Canada. I had every right to fire all their butts for slopping up every match with constant interference and

"I'm not here to cozy up to Sting or Samoa Joe or Jeff Jarrett or anyone else. I'm here to represent TNA management to the fans. Frankly, I don't even care if the fans themselves like me, so long as they're satisfied with the cards we put together."

switch-offs. But I don't think that's what the fans want. The fans want to see these guys get beat down one by one, or else prove they can win on their own.

Q: It's still pretty unusual to hear Jim Cornette talk about being concerned for what the fans want to see. Does it bother you that a lot of fans are still unsure whether to trust your in-



Cornette's first appearance on behalf of TNA management came at the promotion's Slammiversary pay-per-view, and not a minute too soon. The "Louisville Lip" immediately stripped Jeff Jarrett of the NWA World title following his controversial victory in the main event.

tentions as managing director?

A: As managing director, it's my job to see justice done and also to make the matches fans want to see. Look, people know me best as a manager, where the motivation has to be to look out for the guys you manage. But as a promoter, booker, or managing director, if you're going to be successful, you have to put the fans first. I did that in Smoky Mountain. I did that in OVW. I did that as ROH commissioner. I'll do that here, too.

Q: Fans have been conditioned to characterize sideline wrestling personalities—whether they're managers, announcers, or officials—as being either pro-rulebreaker or pro-fan favorite. So far, your reign has defied a convenient label. Is that by intent?

A: Absolutely. I'm not here to cozy up to Sting or Samoa Joe or Jeff Jarrett or anyone else. I'm here to represent TNA management to the fans. Frankly, I don't even care if the fans themselves like me, so long as they're satisfied with the cards we put together. What does that mean? That means we're not about politics and who's related to whom. Read into that what you like.

Q: On several TNA broadcasts, you've taken some not-so-subtle jabs at WWE and ECW, although you haven't mentioned either by name. Is TNA ready to up the ante with WWE?

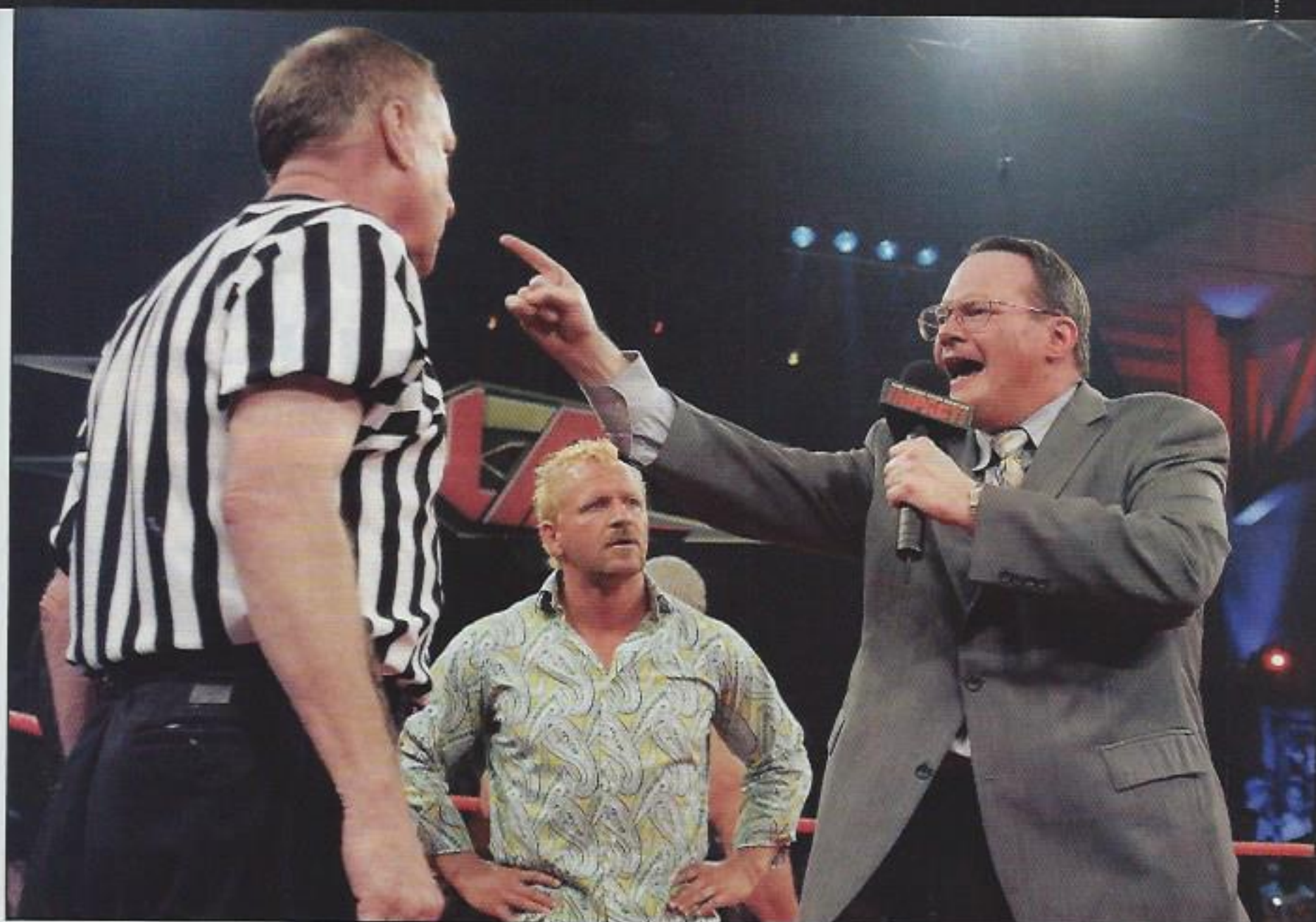
A: Why not? They're spinning their wheels while we keep moving forward. They keep recycling the same old ideas over and over again. How many more times will Vince McMahon put the "bare ass" in embarrassment with another one of his stupid KMA Club segments? How many more times do we get to see son-in-law cut another 20 minute promo, spit water in the air, and do the crotch chop? As for ECW, TNA legitimately offers the fans something different than WWE, not just a corporate brand extension that has the WWE's fingerprints all over it.

Q: In that case, how would you respond to the long-time criticism that Jeff Jarrett always seems to be in the thick of the title picture?

A: I'd respond this way: That's the difference between the "Silence Of The Lames"-type of leadership that pervades this business and TNA with Jim Cornette as the managing director. I'm not afraid of Jeff Jarrett or anyone else. If they step out of line, there will be consequences.

Q: Would you agree, though, that Jarrett is a dangerous enemy to have, especially with Scott Steiner in his corner?

A: Ahh, the Jeff Jarrett-Scott Steiner alliance: "The insensible force meets the illiterate object." As far as Steiner goes, how long do you think that nut job can get along with Jeff? Back when I was managing The Midnight Express going up against Scott and his brother, I discovered it's pretty easy to get in Scott's head ... there's plenty of room for rent up there. As for Jarrett,



I've said on *Impact* that I've known him since he was a kid. He's become a total punk. It's pathetic that he had to rely on paying off a sleaze like Earl Hebner—Earl *stinkin'* Hebner—to regain the NWA World title.

Q: So why did you give the title, even temporarily, back to Jarrett?

A: There was only one fair way to sort out the mess created at Slammiversary. Christian Cage didn't win the match, so I couldn't award him the belt. And very honestly, I didn't think Jarrett was capable of keeping the belt against the type of challengers—like Cage and Sting—who were awaiting him. The way I saw it, if Jarrett proved me wrong, he deserved the belt. Besides, there's real value in a champion everyone wants to see get beat. If he loses the belt, the fans are happy; if he gets pummeled and barely escapes, the fans want to see him get his the next month. Also, if I must say so myself, I made sure justice was done when I made an example of Hebner and fired him. What a legacy that guy has, huh? Twenty years from now, all people will remember is that he's the guy who was paid off by Ted DiBiase to deliver the WWF belt, paid off by Jarrett to deliver the NWA World title, *and* screwed over Bret Hart! Good riddance, Earl.

Q: It's no secret that you still have a relatively old-school mentality about wrestling. In the long-term,

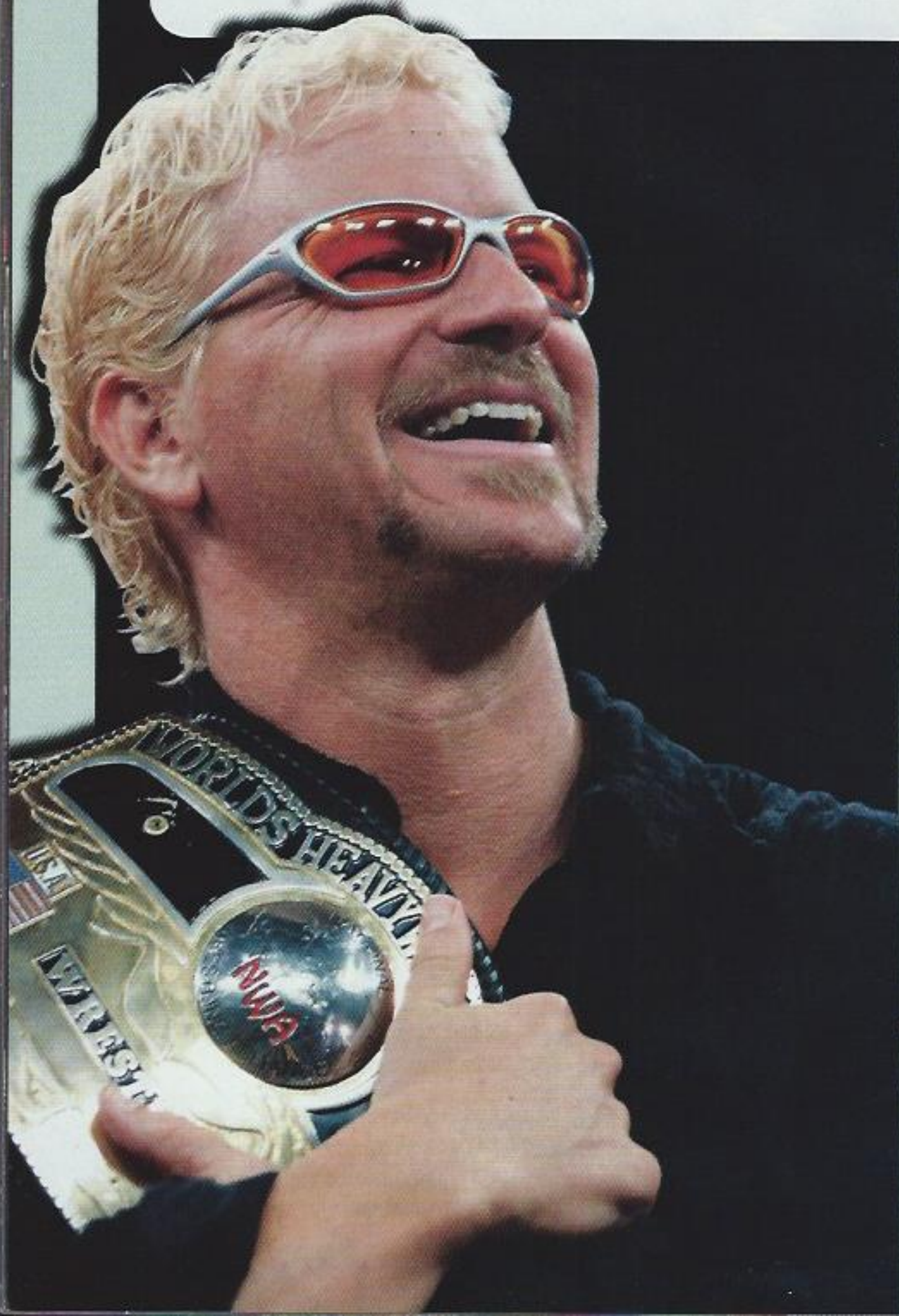
It became clear that the culture of ineptitude that permeated TNA management was over when Cornette cleaned house on an episode of *Impact* in June. The first to go was embattled referee Earl Hebner, who had helped Jarrett secure the NWA World title at Slammiversary.

in what direction would you like to see TNA move—more innovative or more traditional?

A: Both. I'm old-school in that I believe no one ought to get anything handed to him. It's not about pyrotechnics and entrance music. It's still all about blood, sweat, and tears and giving the fans what they want to see. To be successful over the long haul, you have to earn your keep every day and respect the business. That goes for wrestlers *and* it goes for promoters. That's the mentality I expect people here to show, and, if not, I'm gonna do everything in my power to make sure they're not around TNA very long.

But I also want innovation. You can't keep recycling the same couple of gimmick matches that were new and exciting 10 years ago. I also don't want to be like the old dinosaur promotions that disappeared 20 years ago because they didn't listen to the people chanting "Boring! Boring!" while two guys traded abdominal stretches and side chinlocks for 30 minutes. You can never get too comfortable. As long as Jim Cornette is managing director of TNA, I promise no one around here will ever get too comfortable. □

TRUST STEINER, JEFF.
HE'S GOT YOUR BACK
(With a Knife!)



When Jeff Jarrett scoured the contact numbers on his cell phone, he couldn't have stopped at a more appropriate choice. Sure, Scott Steiner has a checkered past filled with controversy and virtually littered with broken bodies—but what's the chance of it happening this time around?

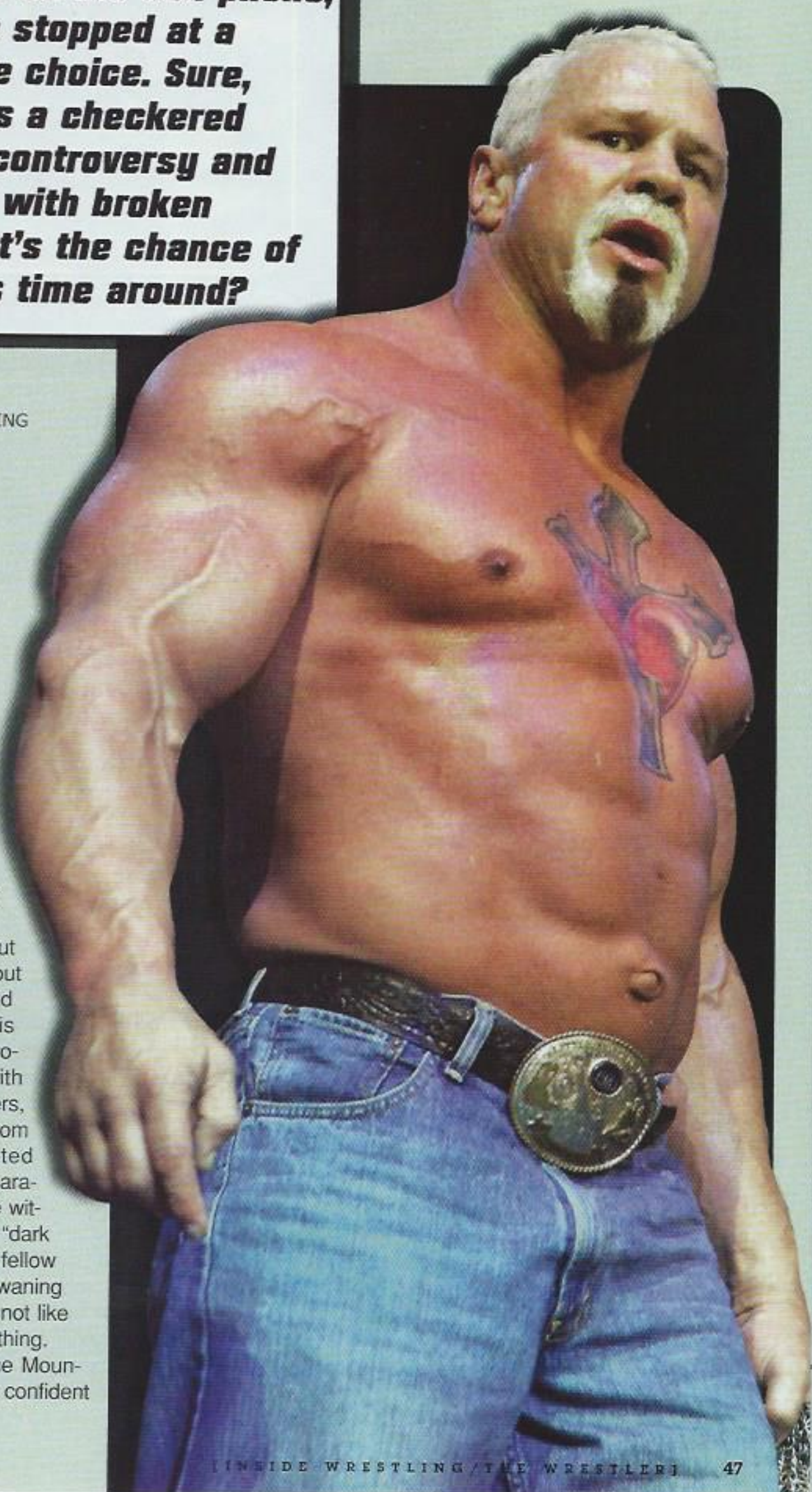
PHOTOS BY LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING

By Bill Meltzer

CONGRATULATIONS, JEFF JARRETT. By selecting Scott Steiner as your closest accomplice, you've chosen the most stable, socially well-adjusted, and reliable ally in modern wrestling history. In the grand tradition of Randy Savage, Paul Orndorff, and Lex Luger, Scott Steiner has never been one to let his emotions get the best of him and take it out on his friends.

All those things you've heard about "Big Poppa Pump's" past—in and out of the ring—are all exaggerations and distortions. Sure, he's attacked his own brother with seemingly no provocation, eventually started feuds with almost all of his other former partners, thrown a woman (Kimberly Page) from a moving car, as well as assaulted Stacy Keibler and an unsuspecting paramedic in the ring. Forget that you've witnessed some of Steiner's so-called "dark side" with your own eyes, both as fellow Magnificent Seven members in the waning days of WCW and now in TNA. It's not like the guy is a ticking time bomb or anything.

We're sure you, "The King Of The Mountain," know what you're doing. We're confident



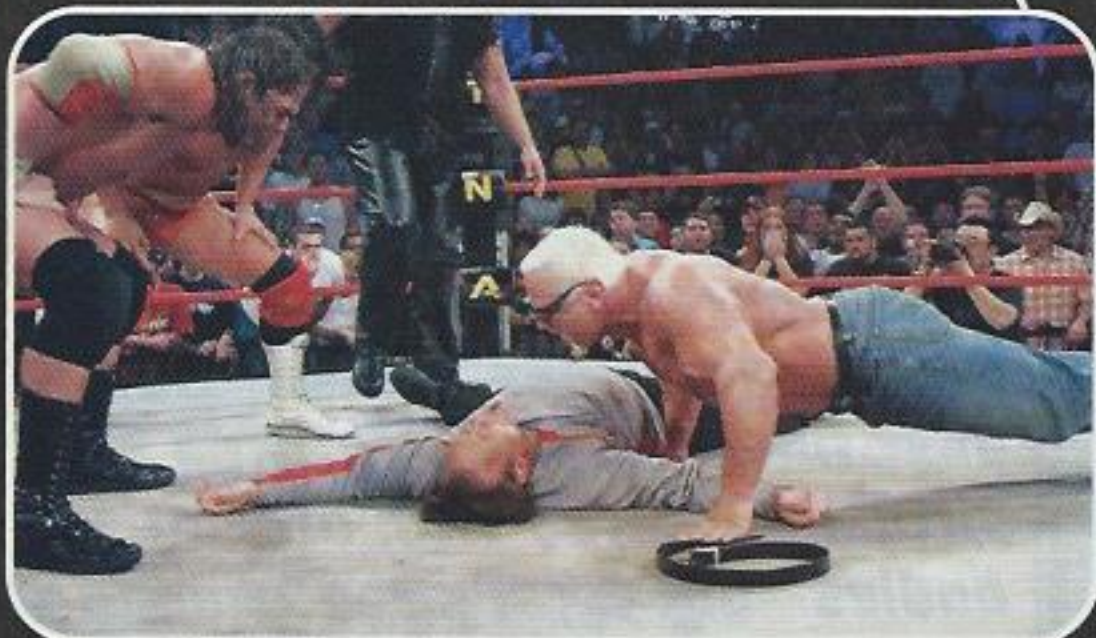
you—and only you—understand that extenuating circumstances caused every single incident involving Steiner. After all, the people Steiner attacked had the unmitigated gall to look at Scott the wrong way, or the audacity to possess something he might happen to covet, like a shiny gold belt. There's absolutely no pattern of violent behavior to worry about.

Even if he did have a checkered history, things will be different this time. Won't they? That's because *you* are in total control. And really, what's there to fear?

First of all, you can always bank on the fact that Steiner will be eternally grateful to you for bringing him to TNA after a few years away from the ring. And, of course, while he's so thankful, he could just explode any moment ... with an outpouring of love for good ol' "Double J." He's so content being your sidekick that he'd gladly follow you to the ends of the earth, whether his waist is adorned with championship gold or not.

Secondly, it's not like Scott's one to get frustrated when things don't go his way. No, he didn't qualify for the "King Of The Mountain" match at Slammiversary, nor has he gotten the better of Samoa Joe in their confrontations. But, stuff like that doesn't get to the unflappable "Big Bad Booty Daddy," at least not when he gets the privilege of witnessing a pal like you finagle another NWA World title reign for yourself. It's not that he sees himself as genetically superior to you, with a more legitimate wrestling pedigree—that just wouldn't be the "Genetic Freak's" style, at all. Rather, his chest swells with pride merely to be in the presence of the legendary Jeff Jarrett.

Sure, Scott once went off on an infamous obscene on-air tirade about Ric Flair on WCW *Nitro*, and so what if he regularly voices his contempt for Triple-H and WWE

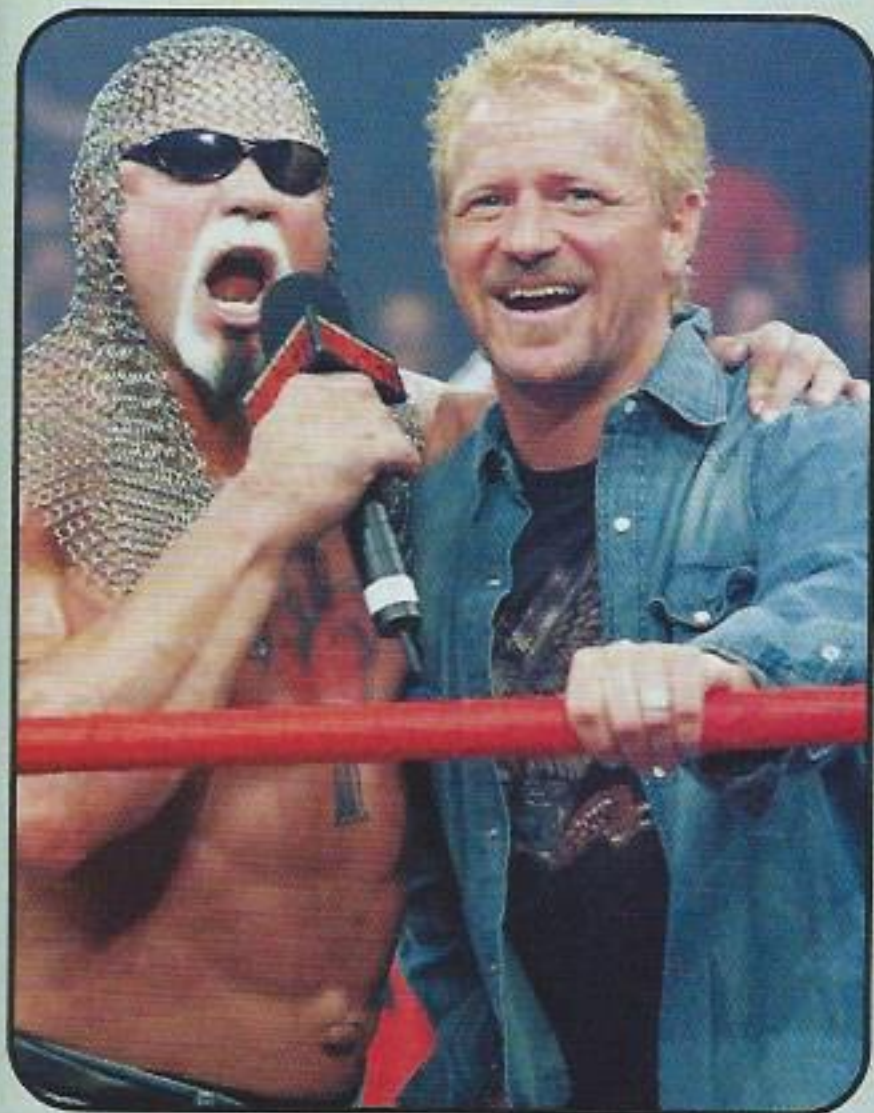


Jeff Jarrett stunned the wrestling world when he brought Scott Steiner into TNA at the promotion's Destination X pay-per-view back in March. "Big Poppa Pump's" impact was immediate and devastating, as he and Jarrett's Army took out Steve Borden.



every chance he gets. It's different with you; he respects you. Thank goodness. It's a good thing your own history with Steiner goes back a long way, although not quite as far as, say, his brother Rick. Besides, even if Scott does, by some small chance, have aspirations in TNA that go beyond fighting your battles for you, he'd never actually go so far as to turn against *you*, would he, Jeff?

After all, thanks to your own record of integrity and trustworthiness, "Big Poppa Pump" would never get the silly notion in his head that you're using him for your own gain. Of course not! Steiner has complete trust in you. I mean, it's not like he's dealing with a Hulk Hogan or Dusty Rhodes here. A partner has never once accused *you* of grandstanding or



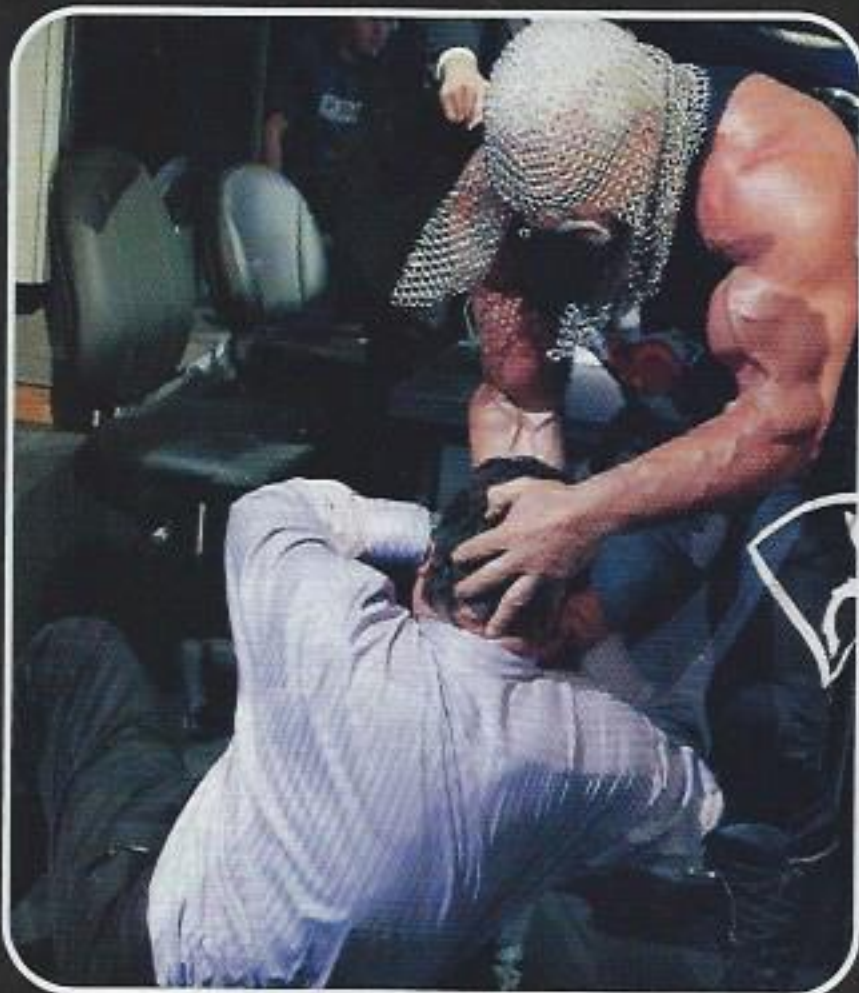
Jarrett's initial plan was to bring Steiner in to watch his back while a very angry Sting lurked in the shadows of the Impact Zone. Thus far, all has gone as expected, although Steiner has begun demanding more of the spotlight of late.

putting your own needs first, right?

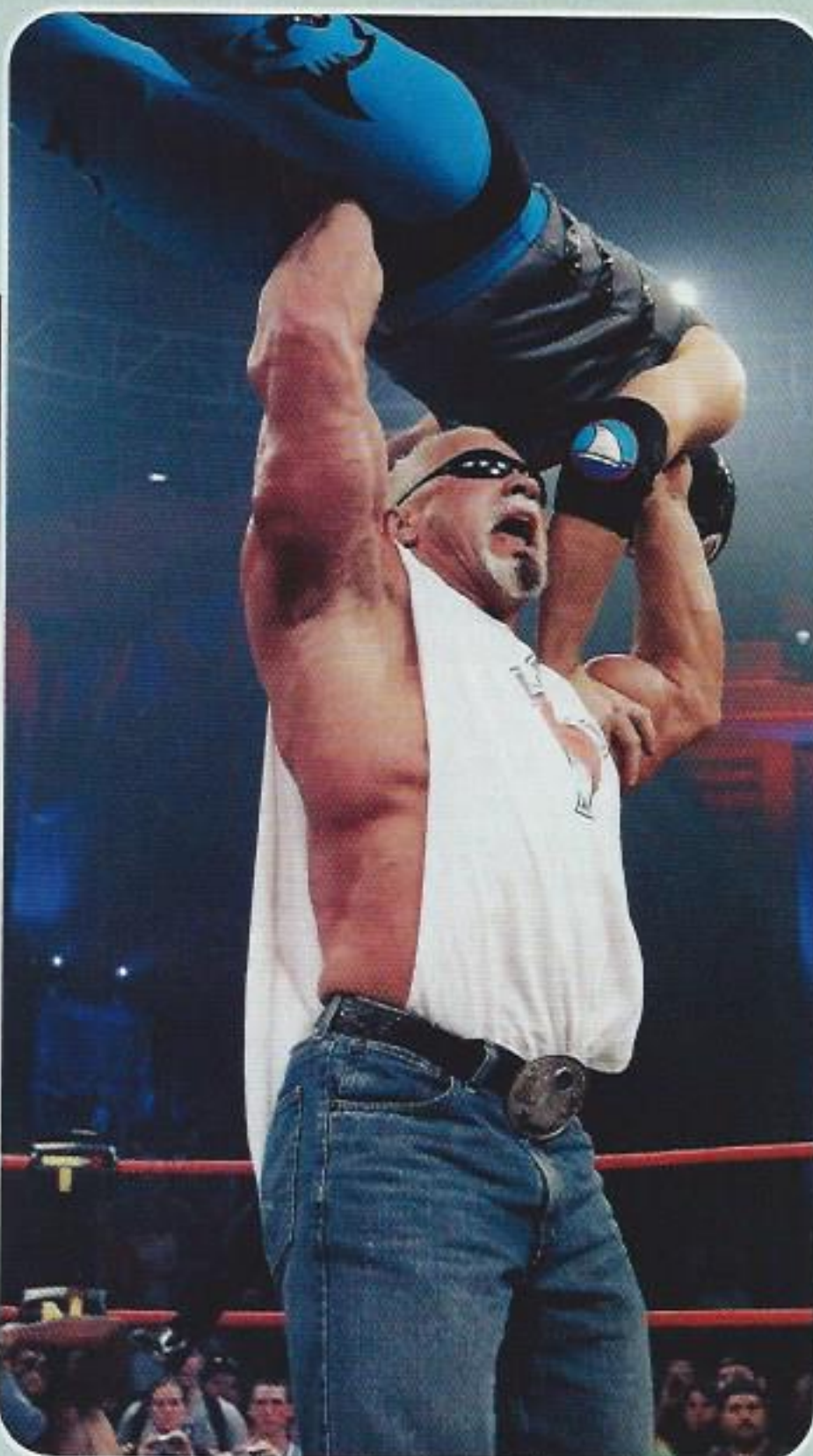
Sure, the other guys in the TNA locker room have started an over-under pool on how long it'll take the "Genetic Freak" to lay you out (with anyone bold enough to take the over of six months standing to collect some big bucks), and a bonus pool on whether he throws you off the stretcher for good measure. It's all a big joke, Jeff, just like that massive new tattoo on Steiner's chest of a heart pierced by a huge dagger is meant to hide what a big teddy bear "Big Poppa Pump" really is deep on the inside.

Oh, and just put it right out of your mind that even some of the most notorious rulebreakers in TNA—including your one-time allies America's Most Wanted—seem to be keeping as much distance from you as possible whenever Steiner is around. They weren't muttering "Good luck with *that*" under their breath when you introduced Steiner as your bodyguard and enforcer. No. They were actually saying, "Hooray for that!"

By the same token, when "Freakzilla" grabs the mike



Because his matches have been few thus far, Steiner has taken out his notorious aggression on whomever he can get his hands on at the Impact Zone, be it Don West (above) or wrestlers involved in other matches (such as Shark Boy, right).



How To Stay On Scott's Good Side

By Rick Steiner

I wanna set the record straight once and for all about what it's like to work in the ring on the same side as my brother, Scott. Over the years, I've heard a lot of crap about how he's got a short fuse and sooner or later how he's gonna unload on his own partners. Now all I hear is that there's no way he'll be able to resist the urge to lay out Jeff Jarrett.

But the truth is this: It's really easy to stay on Scott's good side. Sure, me and him might have had some disagreements of our own—yeah, he turned against me in WCW—but it ain't all his fault. There's a few real basic things about my brother I sometimes forget in the heat of battle.

First of all, when you train with him, Scott don't like it when he can't reverse one of your holds on the first try (of course, as his big brother, I won't let him off easy). He also gets mad if you don't let him get you off your feet. Does that make training with him kinda one-sided? Sure, but, on the other hand, his sparring partners get very good at taking bumps. You get lots and lots of practice, and he'll give you plenty of help, 'cause he only knows one speed—which is going all out.

Second, when you're in the ring with Scotty, make 100 percent certain you never accidentally catch him with an elbow, fist, knee, or especially a chair. He's gonna remember that and make you feel the pain, guaranteed.

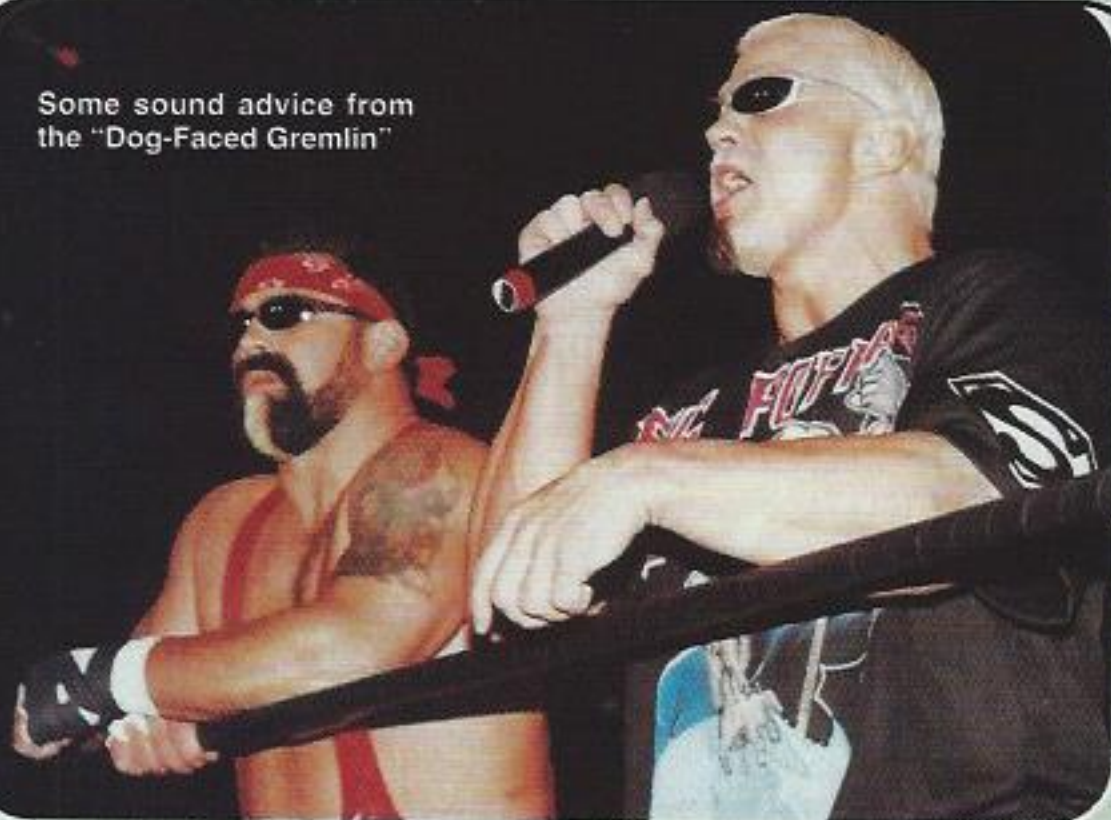
Third, don't ever call him "Scotty." Yeah, I know I just did (twice). But I can, 'cause I can still kick his ass if need be.

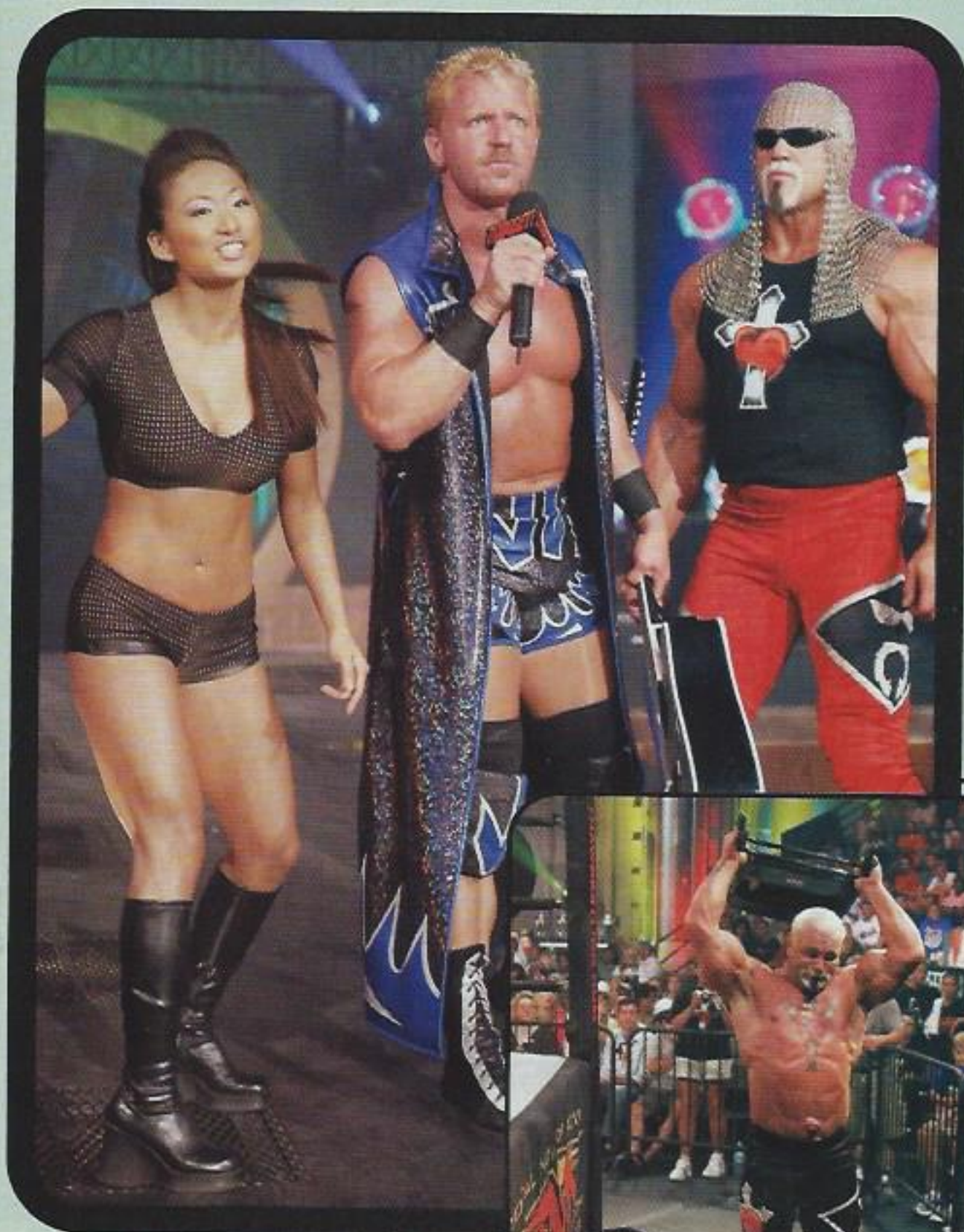
For the rest of you, I don't even recommend you call him "Big Poppa Pump," "Freakzilla" or "Big Bad Booty Daddy." That's what he calls himself, and you gotta be real careful about your tone of voice or you might set him off. Calling him "Mr. Booty Poppa Daddy Sir" probably won't get you beat up as long as you say it with a straight face. You can tell him how cool the chain mail cowl he wears on his head is—but don't ask him where you can get one. He won't tell ya anyway, and he might get annoyed.

So much for the things you shouldn't do. There's also some things you can do to make sure he stays in a good mood.

Tell him how much all the hoochies and freaks dig him. Ya get a few brownie points if you can spot a few of 'em in the crowd for him, before he gets to the arena. Definitely tell him unsolicited that he's got the largest arms in the world and he's one true genetic freak. Predict he's going to be the next NWA World champion. And when he says, "Holler if you hear me," make sure you holler loud. Just don't do it in his ear. That makes him mad, too.

Some sound advice from the "Dog-Faced Gremlin"

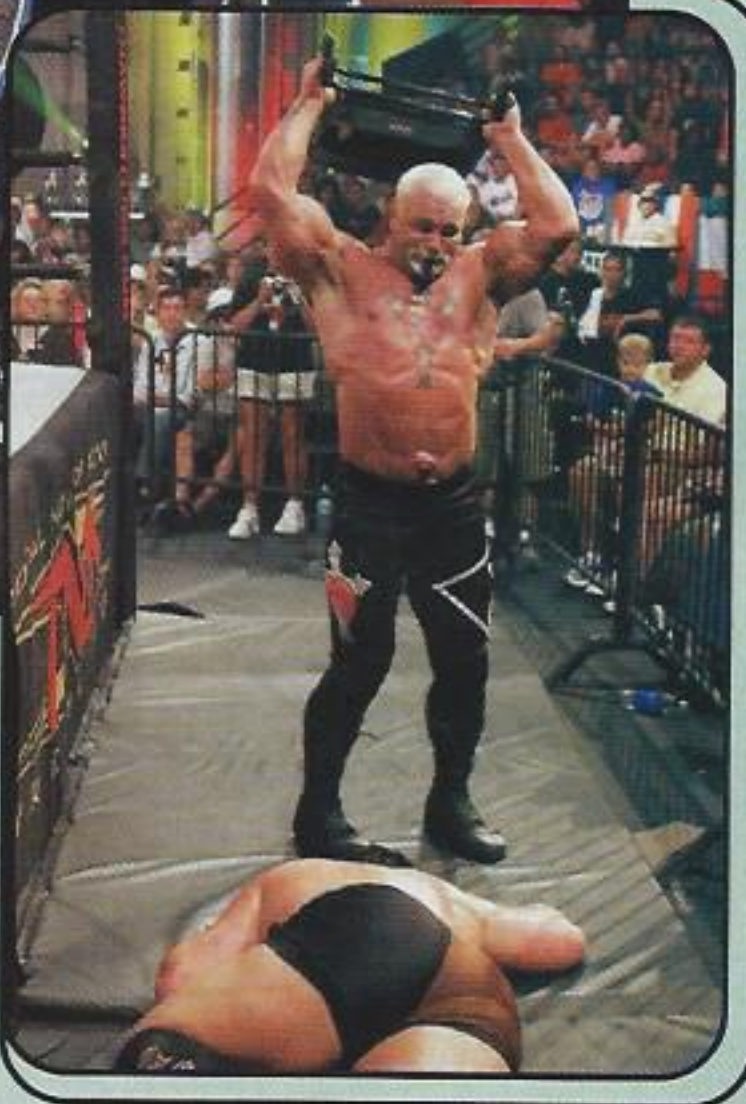




History is not on Jarrett's side, as the past shows that it may be only a matter of time before Steiner takes the attention—by force, if necessary—away from "The King Of The Mountain."

and says, "I'm the real new face of TNA," he really doesn't mean to imply that he wants to usurp the power of the *old* self-appointed face of TNA, such as a certain guitar-wielding rulebreaker who has been the fulcrum of the promotion since 2002. Likewise, when Steiner forgets to add "except Jeff Jarrett," after he threatens to beat up the entire TNA heavyweight and X division roster, there's no cause for alarm. Scott Steiner is known for his positive actions, not his eloquence with the spoken word.

So go ahead, "Double J," feel perfectly comfortable doing battle with the likes of Sting and Christian Cage without even glancing over your shoulder. Scott



The "Big Bad Booty Daddy" more than held his own during his feud with Samoa Joe, surprising many critics. Steiner appears to be in better ring shape than previously thought, and poised to make a legitimate run at the NWA World title—regardless of who holds it.

That's what we thought, too. It's a good thing you're so much smarter than everyone else in wrestling, Jeff. Otherwise, we might think you were playing with fire by aligning yourself with the likes of Scott Steiner. □

Steiner has your back, regardless of the stakes.

Really, he does.

Know in your heart that if—as often happens in wrestling—you accidentally hit Steiner when trying to slug one of the fan favorites, he won't get the least bit upset. Rest assured Steiner will be happy softening up your rivals while you take the credit for every victory. Be fully confident he'd never set his sights on you as the quickest route to the NWA World title. You can count on those things just as sure as you can count on standing ovations whenever you appear in front of your adoring fans at the Impact Zone.

Even in a worst-case scenario, you have absolutely nothing to fear. If Steiner's actions ever do become a bit

troubling to you—if you ever sense a hint of Steiner becoming restless and frustrated—a good-natured guitar shot to the head will set him straight. Your ever-faithful sidekick will never know what hit him. Your pre-emptive strike would either knock him out of commission or, at minimum, intimidate him out of daring to step out of line with you. Can't you see Steiner begging you for forgiveness for coveting *your* NWA World title? Can't you envision him meekly leaving TNA if you tell him his services are no longer required? Don't you see TNA wrestlers lining up in solidarity to help you finish off Steiner if it ever comes to that?

What good is Kurt Angle's talent
when his opponent is using barbed wire?
What good is The Big Show's strength
when chairs are flying? What good is
being good when you're wrestling in ...

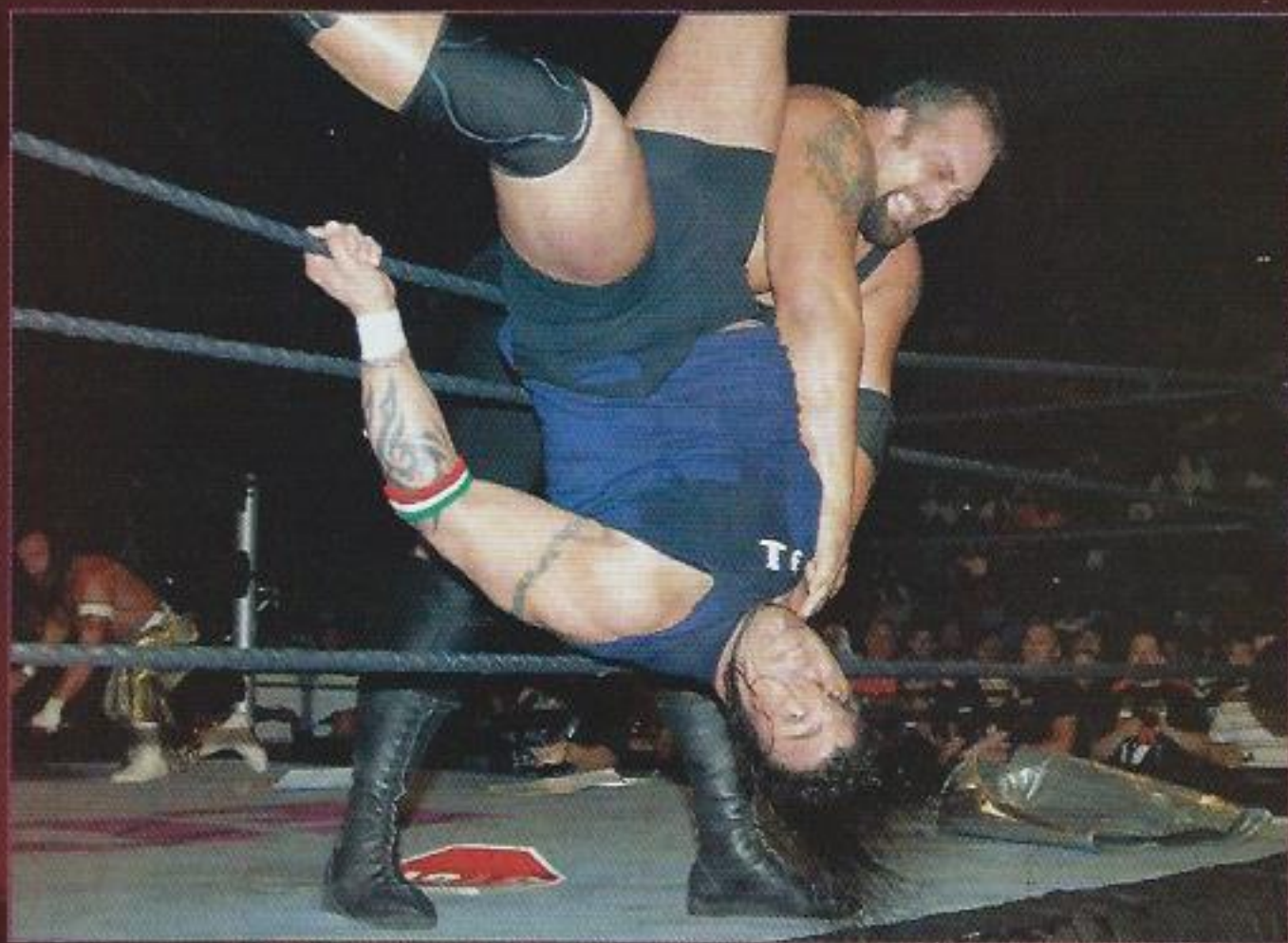
ECW

The Great Equalizer

PHOTOS BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

By Will Welsh

AT A RECENT ECW house show, two of the brand's wrestlers were talking backstage. Both had been part of the promotion before it folded in 2001, and, in the years since, both had made their livings by wrestling overseas and on the independent circuit. For both of them, the rebirth of ECW has been a boon: It has ended their days of hustling for paydays and matches and brought some stability to both of their lives. Yet, as they sat and talked, it was clear that even though they were once again wrestling full-time, at least one of them was unsure about their future.



ECW champion Big Show had better watch his back if he wants to hold onto his newly acquired title. His colossal size and brute strength will only be so effective in WWE's new brand, where chairs shots to the back are a daily occurrence.



"So, whaddya think?"

"What do I think about what?"

"The WWE guys that are on the roster ... whaddya think?"

"Honestly, I'm not all that worried about them. They don't concern me."

"Whaddya mean they don't concern you? Kurt Angle is one of the best wrestlers in the history of the sport. The Big Show is one of the biggest wrestlers in the history of the sport. Heck, even a guy like Test seems like he could do some damage. We rarely had to wrestle guys his size back in the day. I don't know. I almost feel like WWE added these guys to the roster so that we'd fail."

"Then WWE is going to be disappointed, because we ain't gonna fail."

"Oh, get off it, man. The Big Show already has the title! We're just a month into this, and he already has the damn title!"

"Yeah, he does—and I say that we nail him over the head with a chair or two and take it from him."

Even those who didn't follow wrestling during the first incarnation of ECW have realized by now that ECW is not WWE. Sure, Vince McMahon and the rest of the WWE higher-ups might be trying to make ECW as close to WWE as possible. For example, the parent company has added a number of WWE wrestlers to its roster, booked ECW TV tapings in massive arenas, and has even quickly turned ECW grandmaster Paul Heyman into just another corrupt wrestling executive.

In fact, by all accounts, looking at ECW's current state, it does resemble a mini-WWE, especially when guys like Angle, Big Show, and Test are near the top of the card, while ECW icons like The Sandman are making ridiculous gimmicky appearances every week.

ECW isn't WWE, though—and those wrestlers who believe it is are in for a rude awakening.

Still, some within ECW don't appear to be entirely convinced of the advantage that comes with being a veteran of the promotion. To the wrestlers that made up ECW—as well

as the fans that followed it—being "hardcore" was not only about what one did in the ring; it was also a state of mind. Back at the arena, the discussion shifted to how a wrestler can succeed in the harsh territory that is ECW.

"What? You think it's that easy? He's The Big Show! He's a former WCW champion, a former WWE champion, and now he's our champion! What makes you think he'll be so easy to beat, even with chairs?"

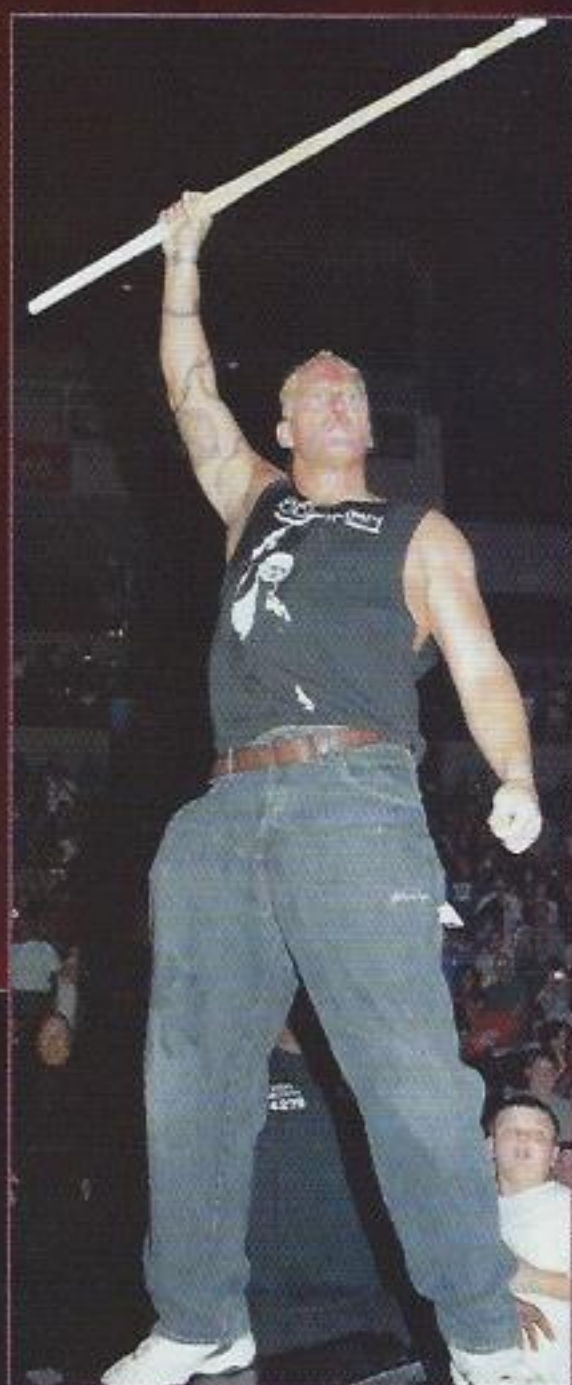
"Listen, he might be near 7', and he might be the ECW champion, but he ain't ECW. It takes more than size, a belt, and Heyman's blessing to truly become extreme."

"Oh yeah? What's it take then?"

"Dedication. Resilience. The ability to survive not just one match—but survive life in ECW itself."

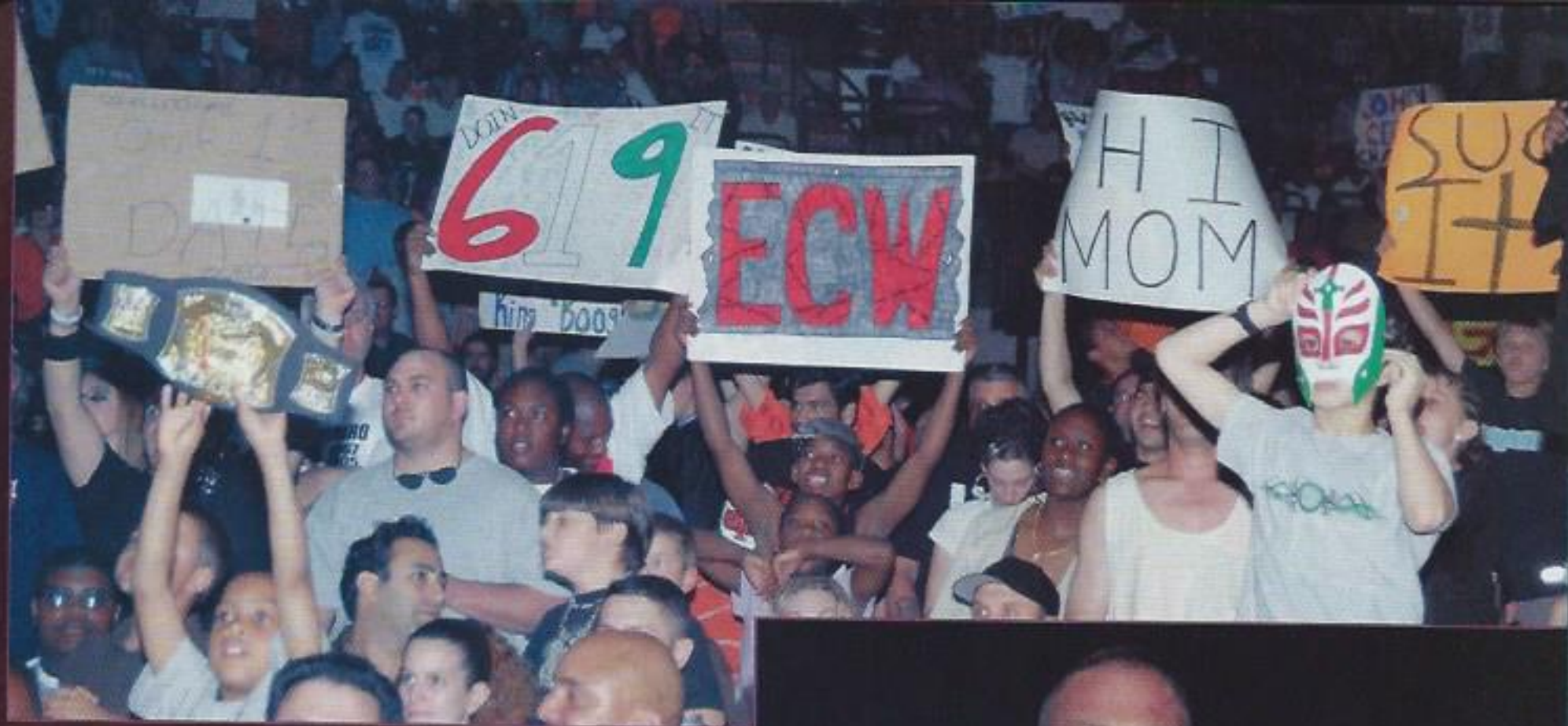
The ECW style of wrestling is unlike anything WWE has ever presented before. Though not every match is wrestled under extreme rules—like it was in the promotion's first incarnation—the fast-paced anarchy that is ECW gives every wrestler a chance to win any match.

Legendary ECW alumni have been sidelined in favor of Raw and Smackdown wrestlers. The Sandman has been reduced to his beer can crushing and kendo stick ass kickings against meaningless gimmick characters.



Angle might be an Olympic gold medalist and expert technical wrestler, but his mat skills will be useless if he doesn't soon learn what the "E" in "ECW" stands for.





The new ECW is undoubtedly branded with the WWE mark—so much so, that many of the fans who attend the shows bring signs, T-shirts, and masks to support their Raw and Smackdown favorites.

Sure, just because of his technical skill, Olympic gold medalist Angle is going to have a shot at winning any match he competes in, no matter whom he is up against. But, if you add in tables, ladders, chairs, barbed wire, run-ins, and everything else that is legal in ECW during an extreme match, the odds tend to balance out. When up against an ECW wrestler who understands the format and how to use it to his benefit, Angle might even be wrestling at a slight disadvantage, no matter how skilled a mat technician his opponent is or isn't.

Of course, there is the distinct possibility that WWE wrestlers coming into ECW will learn the extreme style. It probably won't be long before they also realize that they can use the great equalizer to their benefit. When that happens, when they figure out how to best utilize ECW's lack of structure to gain momentum and win matches, the WWE wrestlers could then find themselves at an advantage. Really, at this point in the rebirth of ECW, only one man has perfected a blend of WWE technical skill and ECW extremity: Rob Van Dam.

RVD might no longer have the ECW championship, but that doesn't mean he isn't the ultimate ECW wrestler. He's the perfect amalgam of WWE and ECW. He's tremendously proficient in the ring and, ironically, thanks to his years in WWE, he's probably as good a pure wrestler as he's ever been. Now that he's back in ECW, he can use those skills that he sharpened during his days in WWE and combine them with a return to his ECW style. Right now, nobody presents such a complete package.

No, the WWE wrestlers who are new to ECW don't know what extreme is yet. They're still new to the world of wrestling without limits, and it's going to take them some time to adjust. While they do, the wrestlers with ECW backgrounds should prosper; they might not win all their matches, but if a hardcore icon such as The Sandman steps in the ring against a WWE legend like Angle, don't be surprised if the ECW legend somehow ends up as the one celebrating a victory.

Chairs, tables, barbed wire, and Singapore canes have a way of leveling the playing field. □



If WWE had its way, the new ECW would be a complete roster of RVDs: He's capable of surviving amid a true ECW match, complete with blood, gore, and weapons, but he is also an established pure wrestler. Who else could have held the Raw World title and the ECW title simultaneously?

EDGED OUT!



PHOTOS BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

When Will Lita Wake Up And Dump This Jerk?

Lita was once one of the top female wrestlers in WWE. However, one controversial decision changed everything, and suddenly her aspirations are on the back burner while Edge chases his dream. Time may be running out on Lita's career—but does Edge even care?

BY BRADY HICKS

THERE IS AN old adage in the WWE locker room, passed along from the agents and the veterans to the younger wrestlers, that says: "Never forget where you came from." To some, it's just a motto; to others it's Eddie Guerrero adopting the finishing move of his late tag team partner Art Barr, and then Chavo doing the same to honor his uncle.

Regardless of the interpretation, the maxim is meant to instill respect for the industry, as well as those with whom you step into the ring. But, most of all, it means remembering that—whether you are loved or hated—the fans put you where you are.

Unfortunately, Edge and Lita seem to have long since forgotten this advice.

With Edge, his repudiation of this nugget of wisdom is not altogether shocking. Many have come to expect such disrespect from the "Rated R Superstar." Yet, there were quite a few of her Raw peers that were taken aback when Lita started to mimic Edge's behavior last year. It was all a mystery to them. Lita never really explained to anybody—not the fans, family, or her fellow wrestlers—exactly why she turned her back on everything important to her to run off with Edge.

Some said it was "love." However, it's more likely that the former WWE women's champion simply forgot where she came from.

Despite her shocking change in demeanor, nobody claimed to be at all surprised when she agreed to stay behind—at the urging of friends, and diminished conscience—after a taping of *Raw*. Her man had just captured the Raw World title earlier that night in a triple threat match against John Cena and Rob Van Dam. She just wanted to go over the tape and relive Edge's moment. One can only imagine what she felt as she watched the conclusion of the match.

There was Edge, celebrating and posing with his beloved belt, all the while taunting a stunned Philadelphia crowd. Of course, this was the first time Lita had seen this celebration.

She watched herself—mere hours earlier—writhing in pain on the canvas, the victim of an FU from John Cena. Her eyes turned to her crumpled body in the corner of the ring. She saw herself lying helpless and waiting for medical attention, getting barely a passing glance and a shrug from Edge.

Trudging on, Lita popped in the next tape, this one from Edge's first Raw World title victory at New Year's Revolution. Lita had been so proud of him for outsmarting Cena, that she didn't mind as he focused on—and tongue-kissed—the title belt.

Finally, she forced herself to revisit the duo's "live sex" celebration on *Raw*. Many on the inside have admitted quietly that Lita was reluctant to go along with Edge's plan. It was the newly crowned champion that had convinced her it was the best way to get back at their detractors. Still, she went through with the spectacle, even as Edge gently caressed and stared deeply into ... the championship belt.

It seemed as if it was only a matter of time before Lita began to see what every fan of *Raw* had already figured out: The man for whom she had forsaken all of her WWE friendships, lost the devotion of the fans, and sent her personal life into disarray seemed to be far more in love with the belt than with her. But what are her options at this point in her career? Could Lita and Edge co-exist were she to become an active competitor again? Would he be as supportive of her?

"I know that, personally, Lita is very hurt when the fans call her some of the more colorful names," said Mick Foley, now one of Lita's only allies backstage. "I think Lita

The past two years have seen Lita go from one of the most respected and beloved WWE Divas to a cold-hearted, manipulative opportunist, willing to hurt anyone—including former boyfriend Matt Hardy—to get ahead.



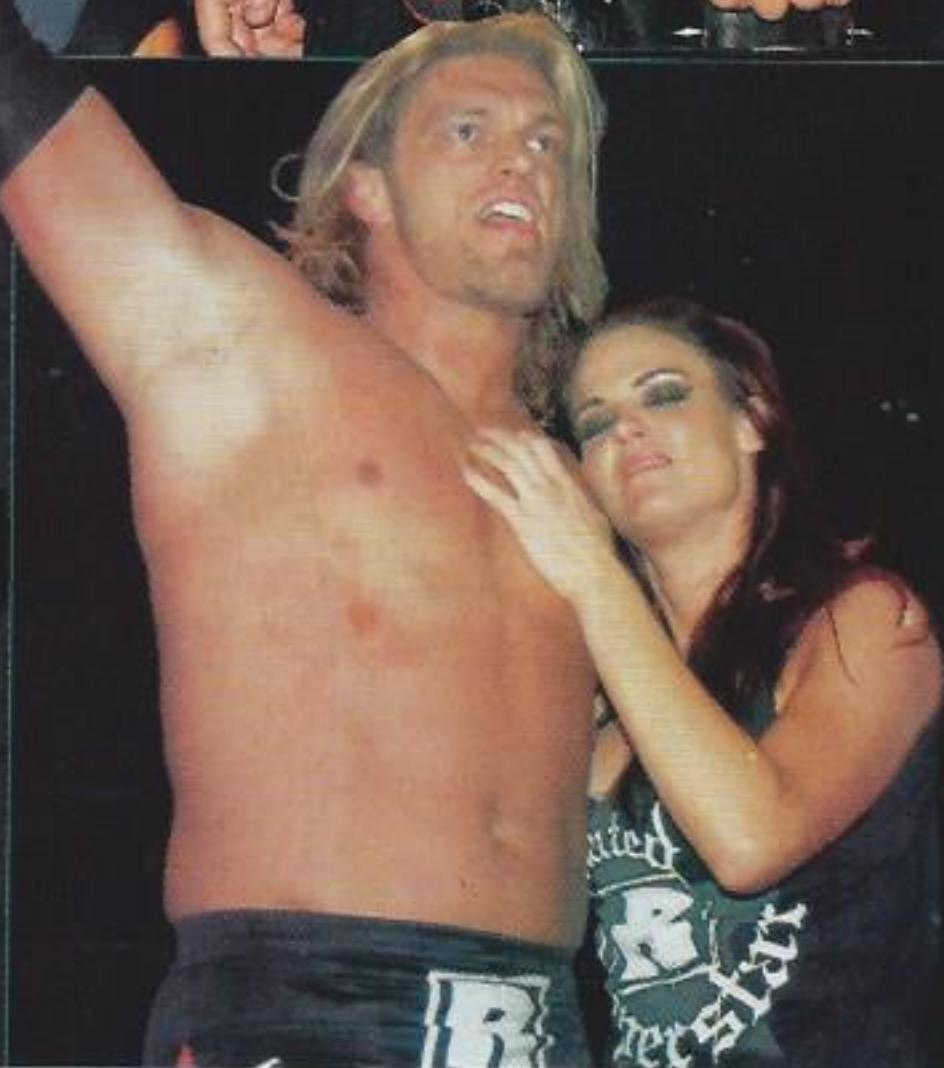
The former WWE women's champion's torrid affair with Edge catapulted her to the top of *Raw*, although not for her skills in the ring, but rather for her ability to shock and appall the fans. Lita soon appeared to become little more than an accessory to the "Rated R Superstar," whose lust for championship gold soon outweighed his affection for his girlfriend.



would love nothing more than to go back in time and rekindle some of those epic battles for the women's championship against Stephanie McMahon, Ivory, and Trish. There's just a whole lot of self-doubt in there right now."

It's easy to see why Lita would doubt herself. Gone are the days of "Team Xtreme" Lita—the woman who was fun to talk to and innovative in the ring. Lita has taken on a persona that is the polar opposite of what made her special. She has learned to embrace this bad reputation because she had little choice. "For the life of me, I don't know what got into that girl," said the legendary women's champion Fabulous Moolah. "But she's nothing like the girl I met that had some class and some pride and a little bit of spunk to her."

Lita has since shown signs of greatness and a hunger to return to a life of her own in the ring. "The match she had with Torrie Wilson on *Raw* seemed to open up something inside Lita that I haven't seen in a long time," said Foley. "There was a time when Torrie wouldn't have given her such



Why Edge's Second Reign Will Be A Success

Leading up to New Year's Revolution 2006, Edge overlooked three factors. First, Edge was not prepared mentally or physically to withstand the rigors of being a world champion. His whole purpose in life was winning the Raw World title. Unfortunately, he had no discernable plan for defending said title. He was merely looking for the quickest and the easiest way to win the title.

This second reign, Edge seems to have already realized that there is more to being a world champion than simply the thrill of winning the title. He is much more focused than ever before on what he has to do to keep the championship each night he wrestles.

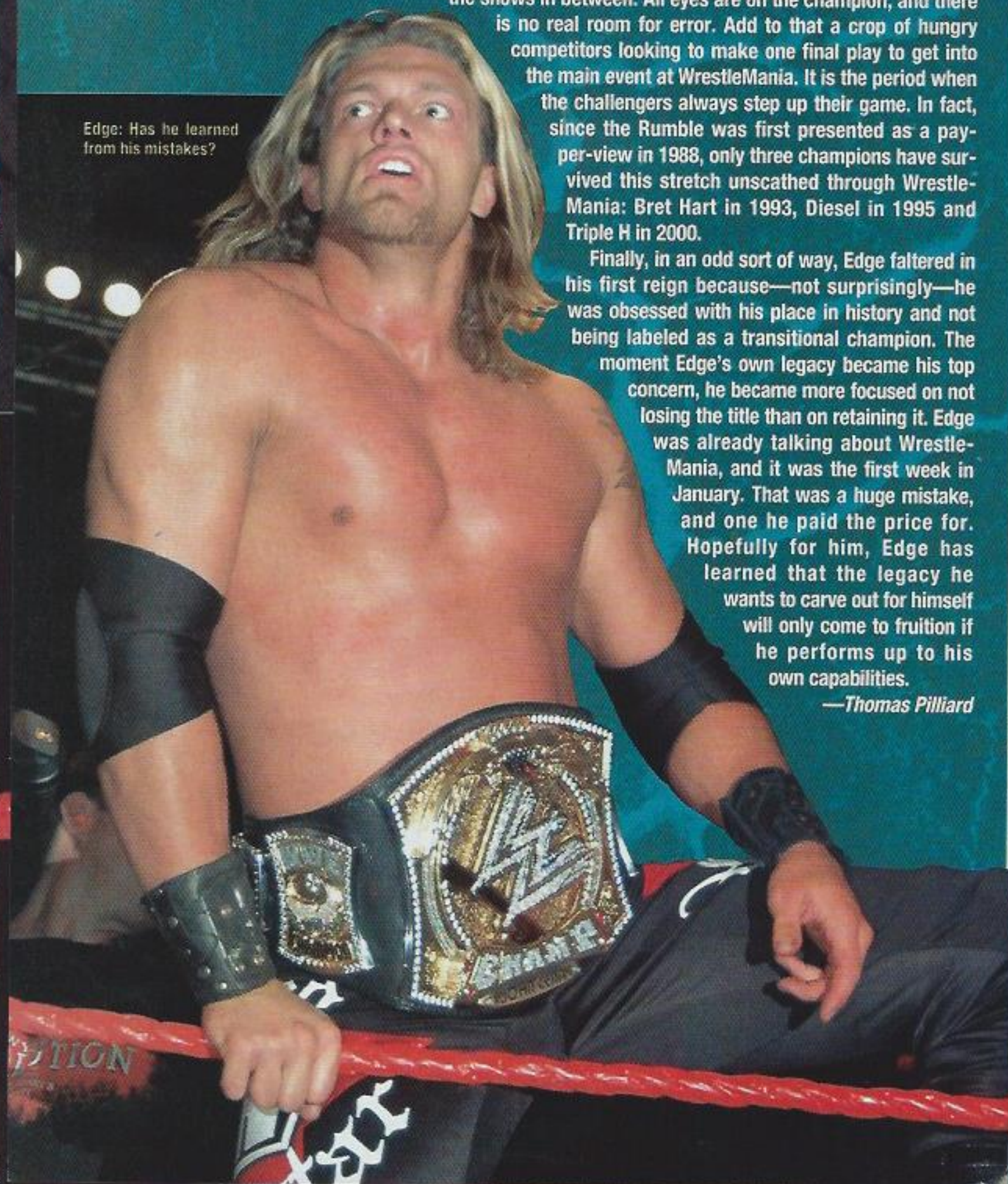
Secondly, Edge also fell victim to what could be considered the most brutal time to be the "hunted" on the entire WWE calendar. The weeks between the Royal Rumble and WrestleMania are viewed as the unofficial climax of WWE's year. This nine- or 10-week period each year puts an immense amount of pressure on the champion to defend the belt on two of the company's biggest cards, as well as many of the shows in between. All eyes are on the champion, and there

is no real room for error. Add to that a crop of hungry competitors looking to make one final play to get into the main event at WrestleMania. It is the period when the challengers always step up their game. In fact, since the Rumble was first presented as a pay-per-view in 1988, only three champions have survived this stretch unscathed through WrestleMania: Bret Hart in 1993, Diesel in 1995 and Triple H in 2000.

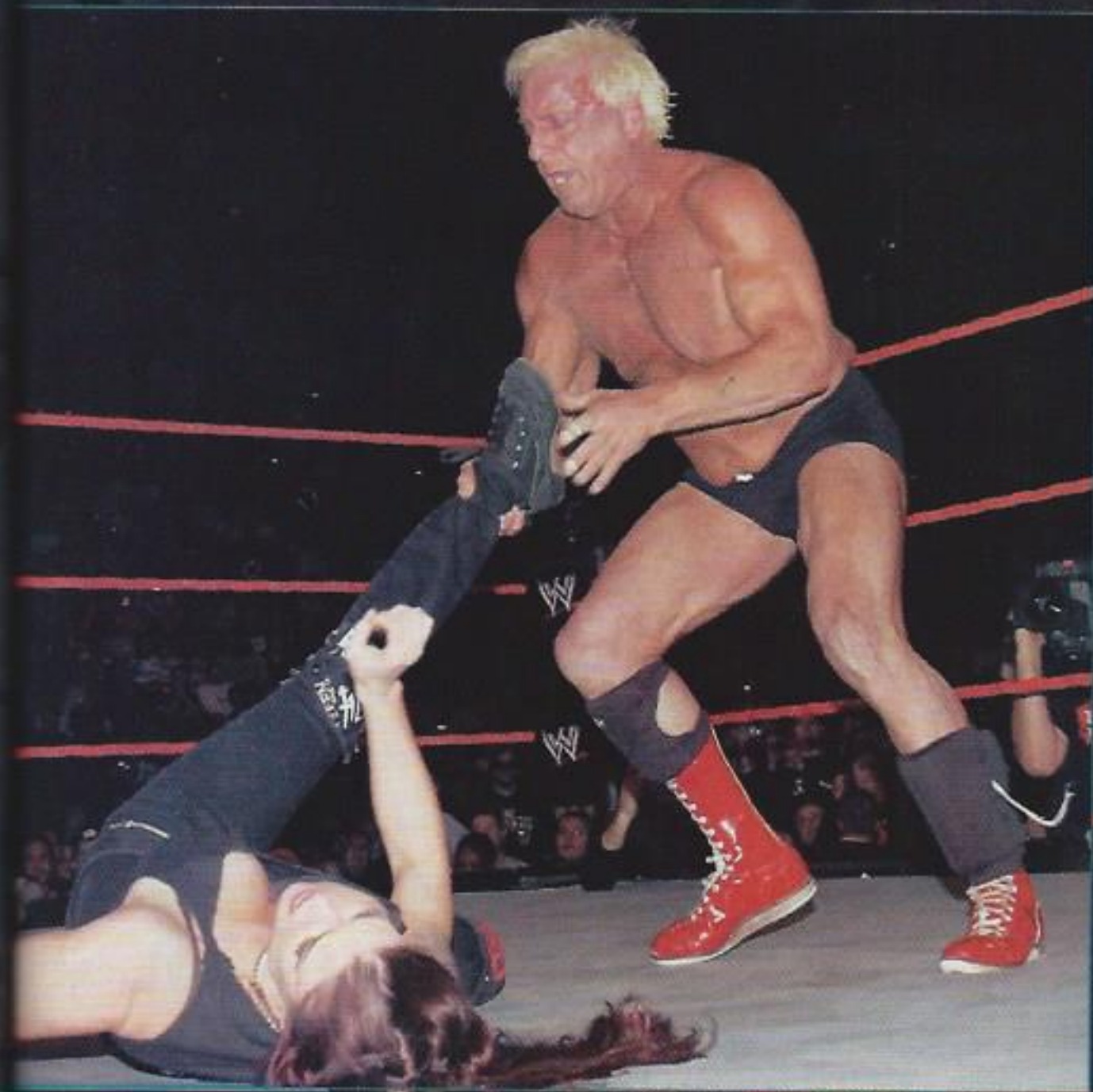
Finally, in an odd sort of way, Edge faltered in his first reign because—not surprisingly—he was obsessed with his place in history and not being labeled as a transitional champion. The moment Edge's own legacy became his top concern, he became more focused on not losing the title than on retaining it. Edge was already talking about WrestleMania, and it was the first week in January. That was a huge mistake, and one he paid the price for. Hopefully for him, Edge has learned that the legacy he wants to carve out for himself will only come to fruition if he performs up to his own capabilities.

—Thomas Pilliard

Edge: Has he learned from his mistakes?



ABC's of RAW
Anybody
But
Cena



It could be argued that Edge would not have made it to where he is today were it not for Lita abandoning her in-ring aspirations to focus on his career. On many occasions, Lita found herself in a precarious position after coming to the aid of her man. Some have started to wonder if Edge truly appreciates it.



a struggle, but, in doing so this time around, I think it definitely opened up the idea in her mind that she was a great wrestler once."

In the end, there may not be any definitive answers to the questions undoubtedly plaguing the former women's champion. "I'd be very curious to see what she does," said Moolah. The legend added, "As strong as she is, she's always had a man there to back her up. Whether it was Hardy, Kane, or now Edge. She never had the strength to just walk away when things went sour. It will be very interesting, indeed."

Which leaves many Raw wrestlers and fans wondering where Lita goes from here. Success has come at a price for the once promising star. Unfortunately, she may have already compromised too much of her integrity to truly enjoy it. □

Lita has sacrificed her body and her reputation all for the good of Edge's nefarious cause—winning the Raw World title at any cost. The greater Edge's success as champion, the less of a chance Lita has to reclaim her spot as one of the top female wrestlers in the industry.



PHOTOS BY WARREN KEITH

CHIKARA is widely considered to be one of the most innovative indy promotions in the sport, and its Young Lions Cup tournament is quickly gaining prestige throughout the industry. This year's winner intends to add to the promotion's growing legacy

Arik Cannon and Cheech fought through 22 other competitors for the right to do battle for the Young Lions Cup (guarded by "Director Of Fun" Leonard F. Chikarason). Both men, with contrasting in-ring styles, legitimately had a shot of walking out of the New Alhambra Arena as champion.

READY PRO AR

Arik Cannon Shines At CHIKARA's Young Lions Cup IV

BY AL ALVEN

VARIETY IS THE spice of today's ultra-competitive independent wrestling landscape, with a little bit of just about everything out there for everyone.

No entity, however, may boast a more unique approach to the industry than CHIKARA,



[INSIDE WRESTLING / THE WRESTLER]

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the four-year-old, Pennsylvania-based promotion best known for its progressive mentality, unorthodox concepts, and core roster of colorful, off-the-wall characters.

But don't be fooled by all of the zaniness (we won't even mention that the company recently introduced Bob Saget—yes, *that* Bob Saget—as its new commissioner). After all, the only “joke” is on those who refuse to acknowledge the product's merits beyond the comedic appeal.

Combining the artful elements of Lucha with a diverse range of styles from around the globe, in addition to maintaining an emphasis on fun in a family-oriented environment, CHIKARA consistently earns rave reviews for presenting some of the most spirited, innovative, and entertaining shows on the indy scene. “CHIKARA is a promotion putting on amazing shows, with tremendous talent that cannot be ignored,” said Arik Cannon, winner of this year's Young Lions Cup tournament, one of the promotion's signature events. “With its unique style and even more unique characters, this is a promotion on the rise. And, I'm proud to be a part of it.”

A GROWING PRESTIGE

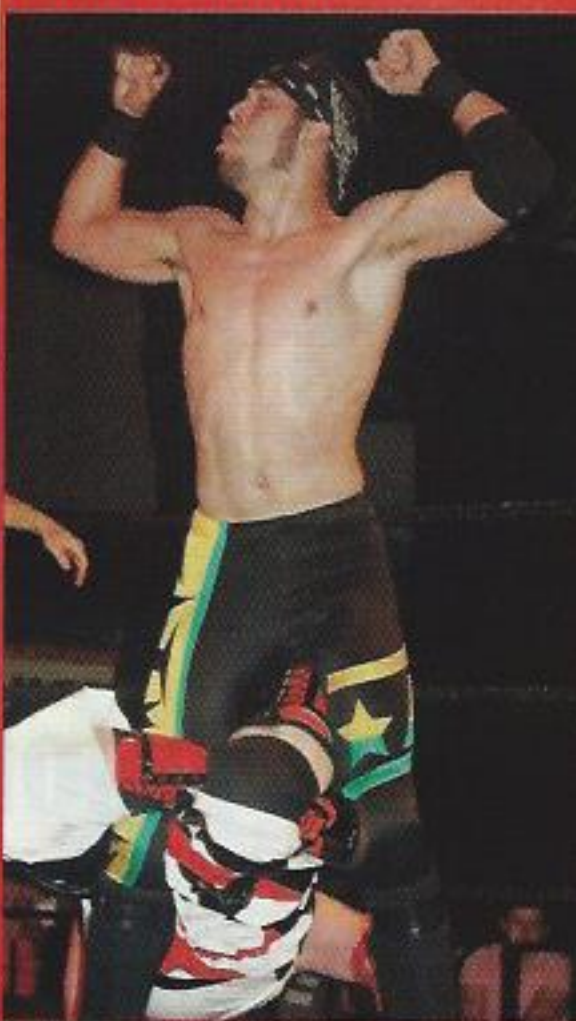
The Young Lions Cup, along with the ever-growing Tag World Grand Prix (a prestigious 32-team tournament held each February) and the Torneo Cibernetico (a wild eight-on-eight elimination match contested in October) represents the highlights of the CHIKARA calendar.

Featuring a simple, yet intriguing, premise, the YLC is open only to competitors under the age of 25. Once the tournament is completed, the victor is presented with a trophy that functions, essentially, as an active championship. The goal is to make it through an entire year with the Cup, then relinquish it for a new tournament winner (previous YLC holders are ineligible to compete).

“CHIKARA is about what's new, and what's fresh,” said “Lightning” Mike Quackenbush, one of only a handful of veterans on the company's roster, and the head trainer of the Chikara Wrestle Factory. “The Young Lions Cup epitomizes those ideals to the fullest extent.”

Previous tournament winners include Hallowicked, “Sweet 'n' Sour” Larry Sweeney, and Shane Storm. Hallowicked and Storm both managed to retain the YLC for the full one-year period. Sweeney ultimately lost his championship in a challenge match to Jigsaw.

Cheech's assault was raw and unorthodox, yet highly effective. He would often catch his opponents (Cannon was no exception) when they least expected it, and he was more than willing to make sure the crowd knew it.



ADDING TO THE LEGACY

This year's version of the tournament, YLC IV, was held over a three-night period in late-June, culminating in one of the group's most successful shows ever, at the former ECW Arena in South Philadelphia. The finals would see Cannon, a four-year pro best known for his work in the Midwest, triumph over up-and-comer Cheech in a tremendously competitive affair.

Cannon, who earlier this year held the IWA Mid-South championship, survived Cheech's devastating “Deluxe” knee strike to the head not once, but twice. With the audience in a frenzy, “The Anarchist” managed to recover, catch his overconfident opponent off-guard, and score with a “Burning Hammer” to secure one of the biggest victories of his young career.

Just to make it to the decisive match, Cannon and Cheech had to battle through some very difficult odds. Comprised of a field of 24 talented, hungry combatants broken into two groups of 12, the tournament consisted of three phases. On each of the first two nights, a series of six singles matches were held, with the winners advancing to a six-way elimination match. The survivors of each would then earn the right to face off in the finale on the third night.

“There is no better showcase for exciting, breakout talent in the United States than our Young Lions Cup tournament,” said Commissioner Saget. And, honestly, who's to argue with or question the former star of *Full House* and *America's Funniest Home Videos* on any matter of authority?



A three-year veteran of the Young Lions Cup, Cannon's poise and experience carried him throughout the tournament. Despite his athleticism, Cheech was unable to overtake the eventual champion.



THIRD TIME'S A CHARM

Cannon entered the tournament as the heavy favorite and did not disappoint. Despite having already achieved success in CHIKARA by winning the 2005 TWGP (with partner Claudio Castagnoli), he had come up short in two previous YLC attempts. This time around, the Chicago native equipped himself with a sound strategy, using his emerging savvy to pick apart and target his opponents' weaknesses.

"While I fit the requirements for being in the tournament, I couldn't help but feel I had an advantage over the rest of the field," said Cannon afterward. "I've been wrestling for almost five years now, making me the most experienced competitor of the bunch."

"I am very proud of this accomplishment. The YLC is quickly becoming one of the more prestigious tournaments in the indies, and I want to make sure I do my part to add to the prestige of this championship."

A European-style chain wrestler proficient on the mat



With his impressive victory at the Young Lions Cup, Cannon now must carry the proud tradition of the title for the next 365 days, a task the 24-year-old proudly welcomes.

and capable of scoring at any time with an impressive array of heavy strikes, Cannon got by a game Danny Havoc in the opening round of night one in Reading, Pennsylvania.

Other results saw Lance Steel defeat Shane Valentine via tap out to a Boston crab, Equinox pin El Hijo del Ice Cream after a standing shooting star press, Don Pysan triumph over Player Uno, Lance Steel (the other one ... long story) force Dragon Dragon to submit to a Boston crab of his own, and Max Boyer slip by Brandon Thomaselli, just lifting his shoulder in time to avoid a double pin.

Cannon was brilliant in the elimination six-way, conserving his energy and focusing mainly on the exciting, but inexperienced Boyer. In the end, he took out Steel to advance to the finals.

VICTORY IN DEFEAT

Like Cannon, Cheech entered the tournament with previous YLC experience, having been defeated by Ricky Reyes in the first round last year. Unlike his eventual finals opponent, though, the 23-year-old remained something of an unproven commodity, still looking to score that one big victory that would allow him to put his name on the indy map.

Cheech, a somewhat unorthodox competitor who has yet to hone a definitive style, found immediate success with "The Deluxe," knocking out Fire Ant in the opening round of night two in Hellertown, Pennsylvania.

The rest of the second set of singles bouts saw John Moxley edge Hydra, Chuck Taylor defeat Ricochet with his Omega Driver, Andy Sumner pin Excalibur, Ice Cream Jr. beat Retail Dragon following a "Sprinkle Bomb" (only in CHIKARA), and Cloudy get the duke over Matt Turner.

In the semifinal six-way, Cheech last eliminated his regular tag team partner, Cloudy, with (what else?) "The Deluxe" to earn his ticket to Philly. He would ride the move all the way to the cusp of a YLC victory, coming up just a little short against the cagey, more-seasoned Cannon the following evening.

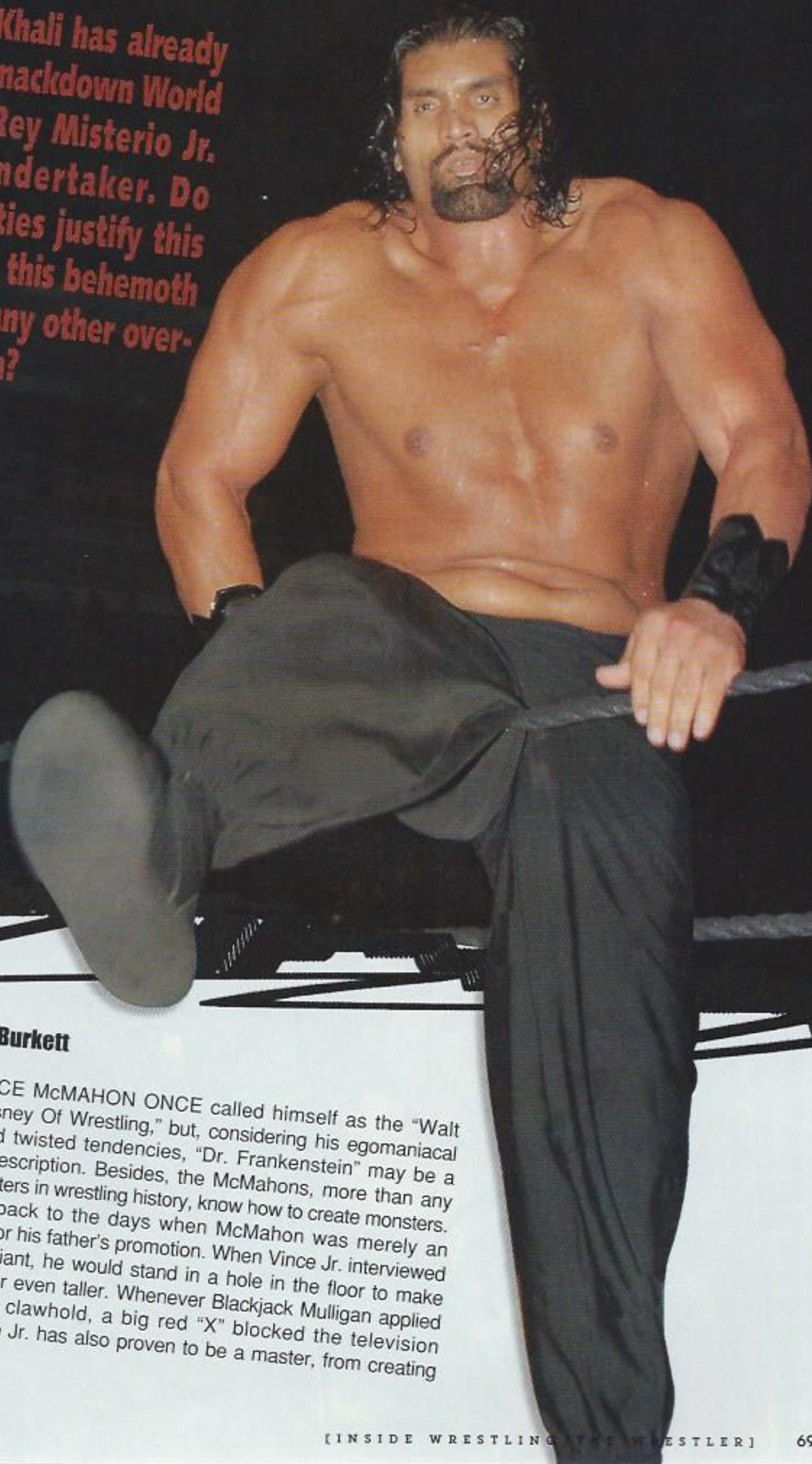
"This was the first time I had ever faced Cheech, and I honestly didn't know what to expect," said Cannon. "But he put on a heck of a performance, and really pushed me to the limit. He looks to have a tremendous future ahead of him, as do the rest of the competitors this year."

"That's what this tournament is all about. Giving us younger guys a chance to shine and a chance to make our mark. It took me three tries to get the job done, but coming back and going for it one last time was all worth it." □

TAALII ORDER!

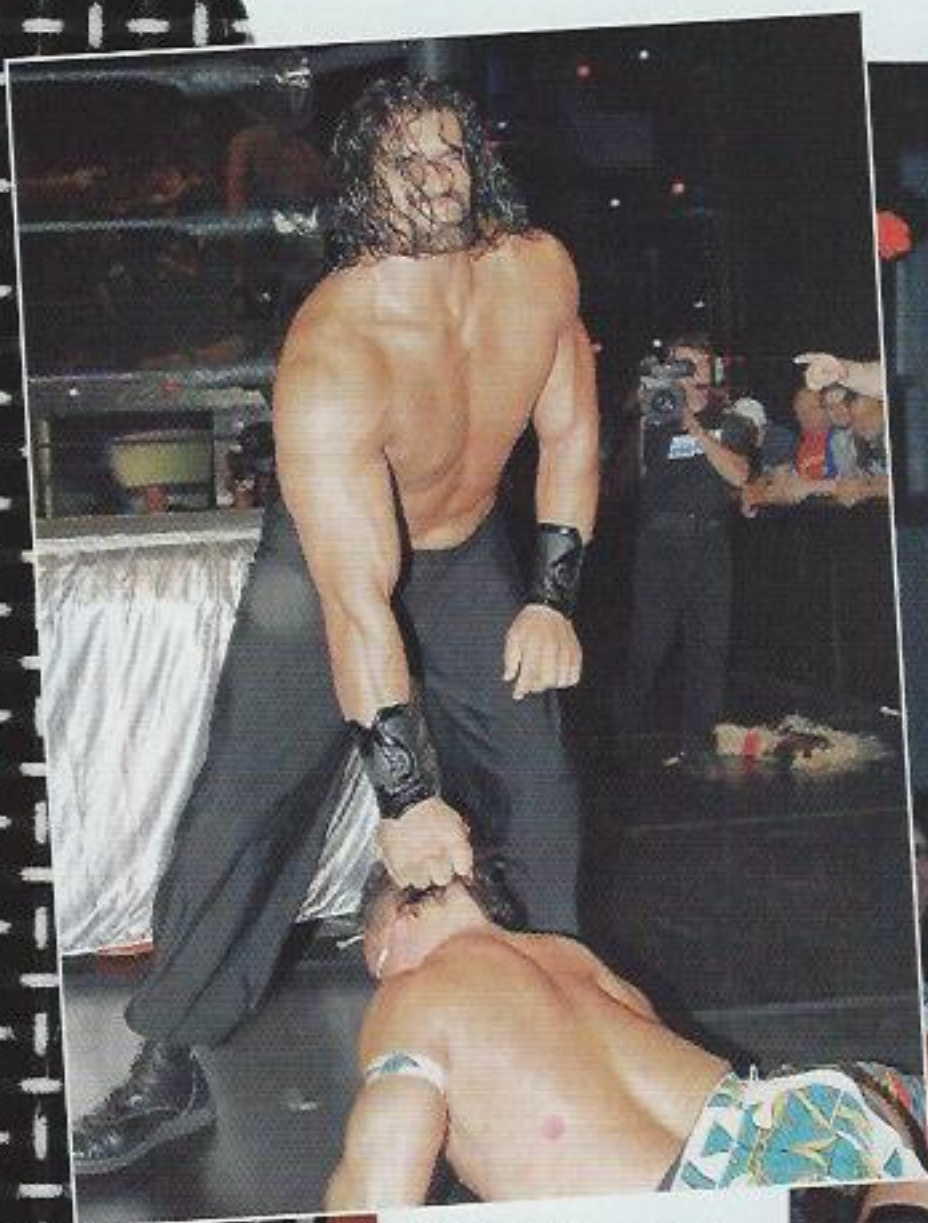
Will Khali
FLOWER
IN WWE?

The Great Khali has already defeated Smackdown World champion Rey Mysterio Jr. and The Undertaker. Do Khali's abilities justify this push? Or will this behemoth fail like so many other over-hyped big men?



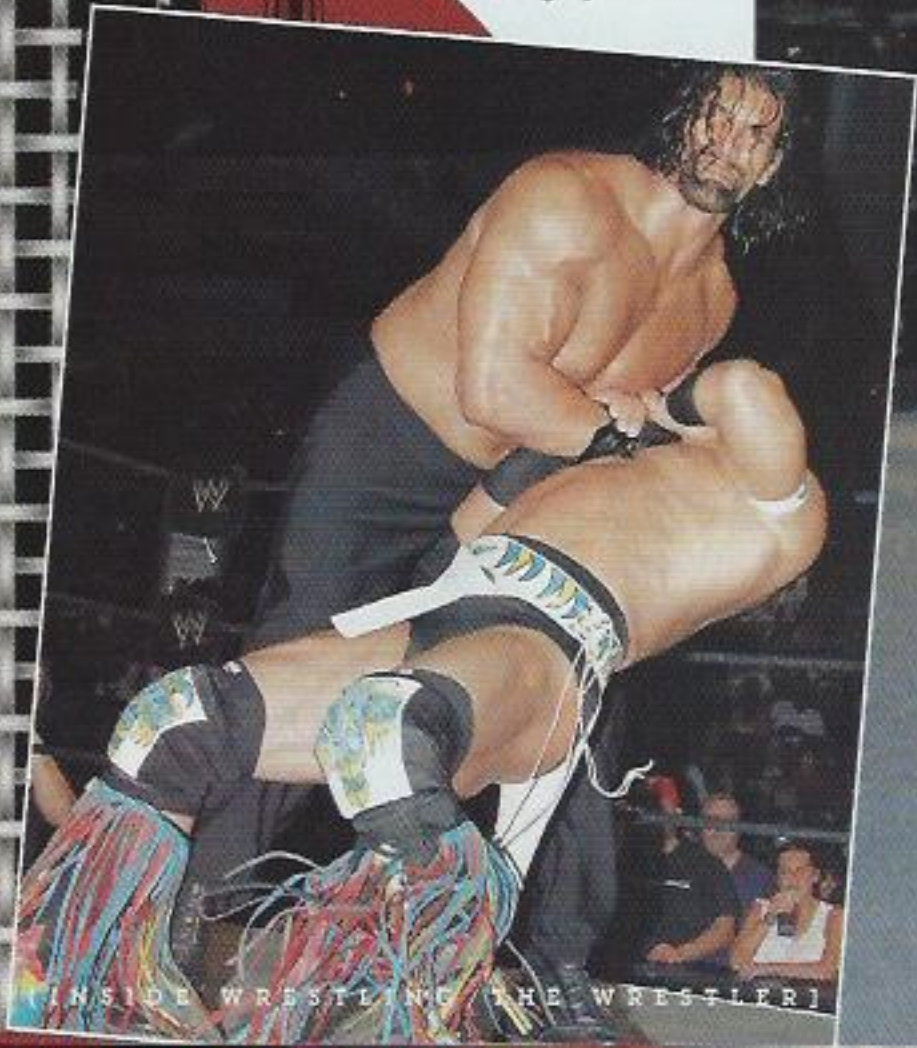
By Harry Burkett

VINCE McMAHON ONCE called himself as the "Walt Disney Of Wrestling," but, considering his egomaniacal and twisted tendencies, "Dr. Frankenstein" may be a more apt description. Besides, the McMahons, more than any other promoters in wrestling history, know how to create monsters. It dates back to the days when McMahon was merely an announcer for his father's promotion. When Vince Jr. interviewed Andre the Giant, he would stand in a hole in the floor to make Andre appear even taller. Whenever Blackjack Mulligan applied his dreaded clawhold, a big red "X" blocked the television screen. Vince Jr. has also proven to be a master, from creating



At 7'3", The Great Khali is able to make his ring entrance over the top rope. Sure, it doesn't quite compare to Melina's ring entrance, but it's impressive nonetheless.

While training at All Pro Wrestling's training school in Southern California, Khali inadvertently injured Brian Ong fatally after the giant landed on him with a flapjack. On the July 3 taping of *Smackdown* in Philadelphia, Tatanka felt a similar impact, and he had to be helped backstage following an intense beating by Khali.



"Big" John Studd's bodyslam challenge, to the supernatural rise of The Undertaker and Kane.

Now WWE is home to a new monster. More agile than Andre, bigger than Big Show, and younger than Undertaker and Kane, The Great Khali could be WWE's giant of the future.

In pro wrestling, so many big men have tried and failed, come and gone, that it's understandable why the majority of fans are skeptical of The Great Khali's chances of success. But, with Khali at 7'3" and 420 pounds, it may not be wise for the usually cynical smart-fan crowd to bet against him. Khali is not a wandering behemoth in search of a quick payday. A careful examination of Khali's life proves that he works tirelessly to achieve his goals and is not a quitter.

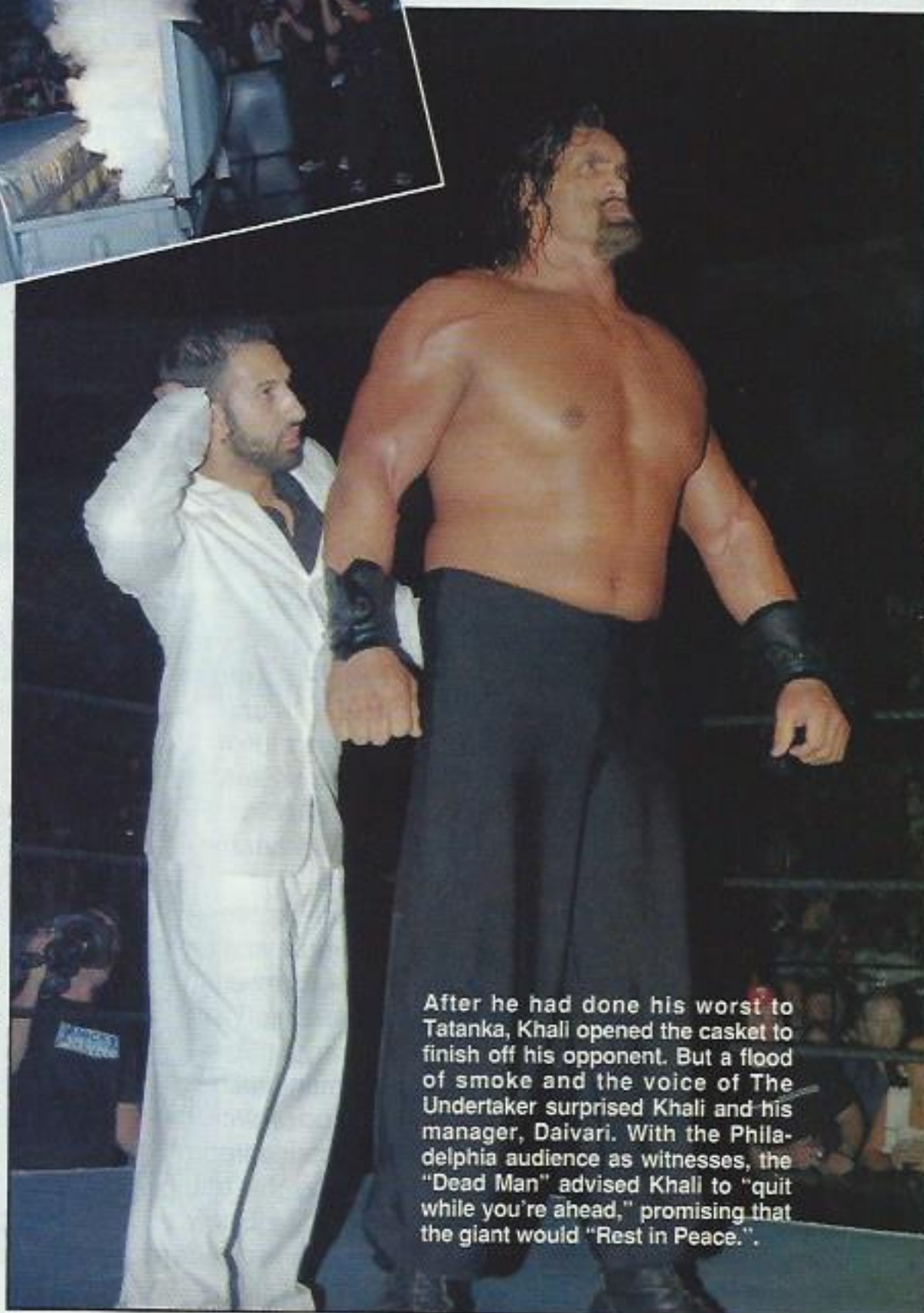
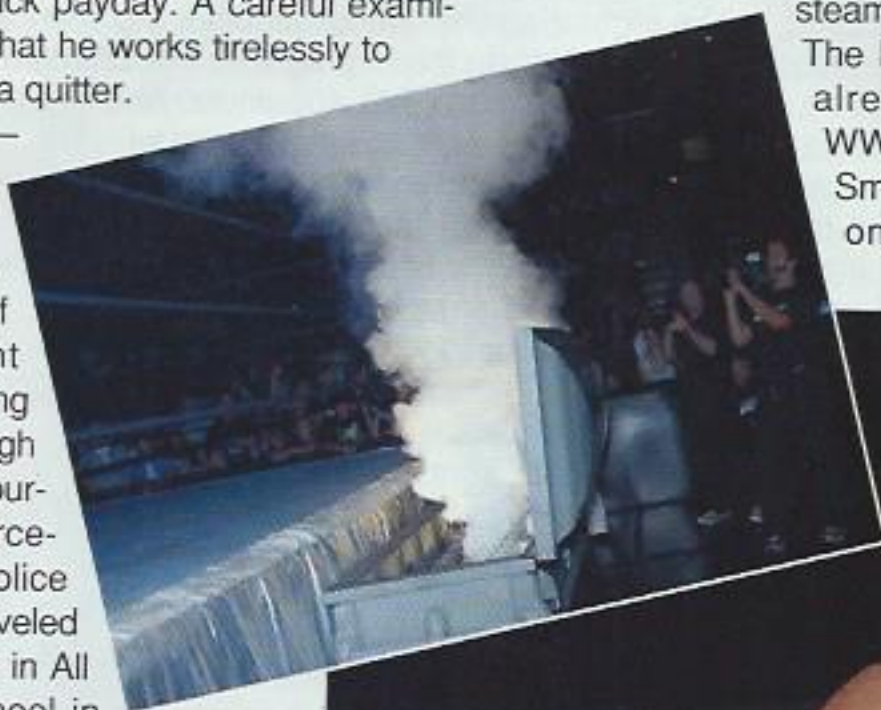
Indeed, The Great Khali—whose real name is Dalip Singh—worked as a stone-breaker in the Himalaya hills before he dedicated himself to bodybuilding. The giant won the Mr. India bodybuilding title in 1997 and '98. As Singh trained in bodybuilding, he pursued a career in law enforcement, joining the Punjab Police Department. In 1999, he traveled to the United States to enroll in All Pro Wrestling's training school in Southern California.

While there, he suffered a professional and psychological setback when a training partner, Brian Ong, landed awkwardly on his head as Singh executed a flapjack. As it turned out, it was Ong's second concussion, and he ultimately died from his injury. Despite that tragedy, Singh went on to join New Japan and team with former WWE superstar Giant Silva to form "Club 7," the largest tag team ever. In 2005, Singh appeared in the remake of *The Longest Yard*, along with fellow wrestlers Steve Austin, Bill Goldberg, Kevin Nash, and Bob Sapp.

"I cannot believe that people are making the mistake of underestimating this man," said *Smackdown* color commentator John Bradshaw Layfield. "How does anybody in their right mind bet against a tall drink of water that stands 7'3" and well over 400 pounds? Obviously, these are the same Internet geeks that said I would never be WWE champion. Part of me feels sorry for Scotty 2 Hotty, Nunzio, and these other clowns that Khali has nearly destroyed, but another part of me wants Khali to prove all these idiots wrong. This guy's a former bodybuilder, not some big guy that was just picked off the farm. Khali is capable of so much more than what he's currently doing, and that's what makes him so dangerous."

Khali made his *Smackdown* debut on April 7, utterly decimating Funaki to score the easy pinfall. One month later, at JBL's urging, Khali faced Rey Mysterio Jr.—and defeated the *Smackdown* World champion almost as easily in a non-title bout. But Khali hasn't just been picking on the little guys. At Judgment Day, Khali used a massive boot to the head to score a clean and convincing win over The Undertaker. Most recently, the seven-footer interrupted a match between Tatanka and Funaki—and choke-slammed both men.

Not since Brock Lesnar has a newcomer received such a huge push in WWE. Like Lesnar, who steamrolled Ric Flair, Hulk Hogan, and The Rock with convincing wins, Khali already has clean victories over WWE's resident "Phenom" and the *Smackdown* brand's World champion. Is there anything to prevent



After he had done his worst to Tatanka, Khali opened the casket to finish off his opponent. But a flood of smoke and the voice of The Undertaker surprised Khali and his manager, Daivari. With the Philadelphia audience as witnesses, the "Dead Man" advised Khali to "quit while you're ahead," promising that the giant would "Rest in Peace."

FIVE BIG MEN WHO CONQUERED WRESTLING

Although pro wrestling is often a sport of giants, it takes more than size to be a successful grappler. From the 1950s through today, there have been several big men who have dominated the industry, but they have had more than their large girth going for them. As you'll learn from the following examples, size does matter—but it's not the only thing that matters.

Killer Kowalski: At 6'6" and 270 pounds, Kowalski wouldn't be a giant by today's standards, but he was just about the biggest wrestler around in the 1950s. Kowalski became a household name when he maimed Yukon Eric in 1954, severing his ear with a kneedrop from the top turnbuckle. Able to wrestle 60-minute matches at a stretch, Kowalski knew that his real asset was not his size, but his endurance.

Andre the Giant: Andre (pictured) is the legend against whom all other big men are measured. For fans who remember merely the 525-pounder who hobbled inside the ring against The Ultimate Warrior and as Haku's partner in The Colossal Connection, it's hard to imagine that a 7'4", 400-pound Andre routinely delivered splashes from the second turnbuckle and executed amazing dropkicks. Andre was a solid wrestler.

Ernie Ladd: The "Big Cat" set the standard for African-Americans and big men in the wrestling business during the 1970s. Anointing himself the "King Of Wrestling," the ex-football star refused to play the same stereotypical roles as black wrestlers that came before him. At 6'9" and 315 pounds, Ladd inspired a generation of hulking wrestlers that came along with him, including Blackjack Mulligan, Stan Hansen, and "Big" John Studd.

Kevin Nash: Incredibly, Andre was only a few inches taller than "Big Sexy." Unlike Andre and The Big Show, Nash didn't suffer from acromegaly. At 7' tall, Nash's chest and arms are in perfect proportion to the rest of his body. Scott Hall once remarked that Nash stayed just short enough to remain "cool" while Big Show (then known as The Giant) kept on going to the "freak stage." There may be truth to Hall's crude comment.

The Big Show: Paul Wight earned the *PWI* Wrestler and Rookie of the Year Awards in 1996, yet soon struggled with his weight, and his career stagnated in WCW. Even after Big Show signed a 10-year contract with WWE, he got the call-down to Ohio Valley, but has since displayed amazing versatility as a performer. Could Andre have remained in the unrelenting WWE spotlight for seven consecutive years? Probably not.



Khali from completely dominating Smackdown?

"Nothing! Nothing!" proclaimed Daivari, who is delighted by the sight of WWE superstars squirming within the massive hands of his charge. "Muhammad Hassan, Kurt Angle, those guys were losers. Now I am glad to be associated with a winner, The Great Kha-leeeee! The Undertaker? Hah! Lashley? Phooey! Everyone in WWE will bow down at the feet of me and The Great Kha-leeeee! My man is indestructible!"

That has been the claim of countless big men who have entered the business, most of whom have attempted—foolishly—to survive on size alone, while others have wisely mastered the fundamentals of wrestling. Which is the most likely route for the mighty Khali?

There has been a recent trend of big men brushing up on the fundamentals in order to keep pace with their lighter counterparts. The Undertaker has incorporated elements of mixed martial arts, including the triangle choke, into his repertoire. Likewise, The Big Show utilized a more technical offense than his opponent,

Tommy Dreamer, during a recently televised ECW match. And, just before his jump to ECW, Big Show wrestled a surprisingly scientific match against former partner Kane on *Raw*. Khali has spent more time in training than any of these men, in both All Pro Wrestling and New Japan Wrestling.

"I understand what Khali is trying to do," remarked Paul Bearer, who guided Kane during his initial six-month rampage through the WWF in 1997. "If Khali can beat The Undertaker with a big boot to the head, then why should he play around with showing off his takedowns? Khali is still an unknown quantity to both the wrestlers and the fans. Believe me, once Undertaker has comprehended his loss to Khali at Judgment Day, he will be back with a vengeance—and Khali had better bring more to the ring than a big boot.

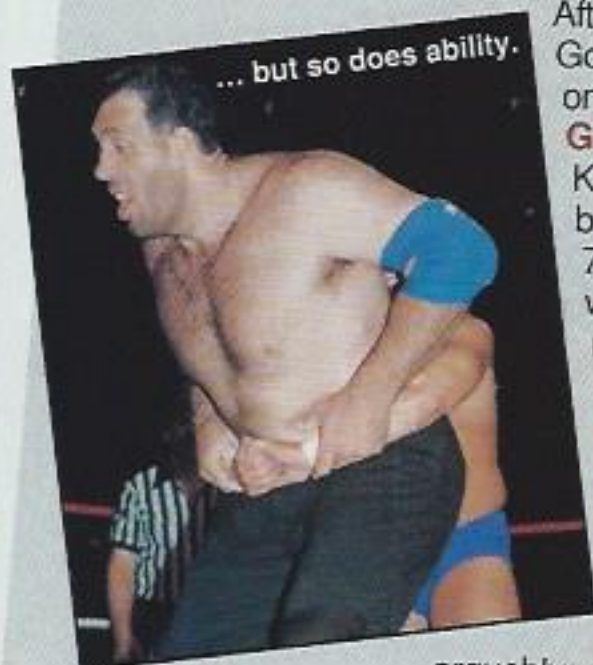
"Right now, everybody is in awe of Khali's massive size and power. But, once everyone becomes accustomed to seeing him, that novelty is gonna fade. That's when he's gonna have to deliver good matches by

FIVE BIG MEN WHO FIZZLED

These men entered their chosen field with, seemingly, all the tools to succeed—but somehow fell flat. And, in most of the following cases, these wrestlers entered the sport amid tremendous hype and fanfare. Barrel chests and legs the size of tree trunks didn't help these poor saps become successful wrestlers, let alone world champions. Where did these guys go wrong?

"Little" John Harris: There was nothing "little" about this farm boy, who hailed from South Africa and appeared briefly in World Class Wrestling in the mid-1980s. At 7'8", he remains the tallest man to ever set foot in a wrestling ring. Clad in his wide-brimmed hat and overalls, this gentle giant served as corner man for the popular Fantastics and teamed with them in six-man matches. But his singles career never got off the ground.

Giant Gonzales: A player on Argentina's national basketball team in 1988, Jorge Gonzales (then known as El Gigante) showed astoundingly little athletic ability upon his U.S. debut in WCW. After signing with the WWF, he donned a painted bodysuit and became Giant Gonzales. Unfortunately, diabetes and other health problems have taken their toll on the kind-hearted man, who is now confined to a wheelchair.



Giant Silva: Silva (pictured) is best remembered for his partnership with Kurrgan in The Oddities with George Steele as his manager in the WWF, but Silva went on to join Dalip Singh as a member of Masa Chono's "Club 7" in New Japan. Since then, Silva has delved into the mixed martial arts, where he has been equally disappointing, compiling a lackluster 1-6 record. With unremarkable athletic ability and without charisma, his options are limited.

Kurrgan: WWE Creative gave Kurrgan a couple of chances as a member of both The Truth Commission and The Oddities. But, despite his menacing brow and jutting chin, Kurrgan never clicked with the fans. Interestingly, Kurrgan's best performances occurred in Real Action Wrestling, based in the Canadian Maritimes. Back then, no one would have predicted that his rival, Bobby Roode, would become—

arguably—the bigger star.

Ron Reis: "Here comes The Ye-tl!" proclaimed Tony Schiavone, as the 7'2", 365-pound Reis—wrapped in mummy bandages from head to toe—ambled to the ring. It marked the height of ridiculousness in WCW and a low point in Reis' career. Reis also competed as "Big" Ron Studd, a tribute to "Big" John Studd. Unfortunately, Reis' career never compared to that of his late mentor, although he was given high marks for his work ethic.



During their first encounter, Khali defeated The Undertaker with a monstrous hands-down victory. A confident Khali began his assault of 'Taker on ECW.

remaining competitive with the other wrestlers. After all, this business isn't a size contest—it's about what you can do inside that ring."

That is the challenge that confronts Khali. How does he showcase his best assets without completely squashing all of Smackdown's wrestlers? And, if he gets down on a competitive level with the 5'3", 163-pound Rey Mysterio Jr., will he remain credible? Jim Ross likes to describe wrestlers as dance partners. Who can survive The Great Khali stepping on their toes?

Yes, Vince McMahon has unleashed another monster on the wrestling world. But has he finally unleashed a monster that can wrestle? □

SPECIAL ANALYSIS:

ARMANDO IS RUINING UMAGA'S CAREER!

His name is Armando Alejandro Estrada. His mission is to take Umaga to the top of WWE ... or so he says. After a comprehensive investigation into WWE's newest manager, we're convinced Estrada's motives are much more selfish in nature

BY DAN MURPHY

ARMANDO ALEJANDRO ESTRADA has been accused of many things, but subtlety is not one of them.

The self-styled Cuban managerial genius debuted on WWE TV in April when he had the audacity to interrupt the legendary Ric Flair as Flair was cutting a promo in the ring. Estrada introduced himself in what has become his trademark manner, stressing each syllable, and rolling his Rs tighter than his Havana cigars. Estrada was clearly enjoying his moment in the spotlight, and he was no doubt delighting in the fact that he was upstaging a perplexed "Nature Boy."

After a few minutes of flapping his gums, Estrada introduced Flair—and the world—to his "Samoan Bulldozer," the 6'4", 348-pound Umaga. Umaga managed to deliver one of the worst beatings of Flair's life, due in equal parts to Umaga's incredible size and power, and the element of surprise.

It was an impressive debut (or return, as Umaga had previously competed in WWE as Jamal from Three Minute Warning), and Estrada appeared to have orchestrated a major coup. With one beatdown, Umaga established himself as a major force in WWE, and Estrada set himself up as a high profile managerial player.

Photo By Greg Greenhard



But ever since that auspicious debut, Estrada has been leading Umaga down the road to ruin, and it's all because of Estrada's raging ego.

After a series of interviews with sources close to Estrada, Umaga, and those within the WWE front office—as well as extensive research into Estrada's background—our editorial department came to the conclusion that Estrada is doing more to harm to Umaga's career than good. Here are our findings:

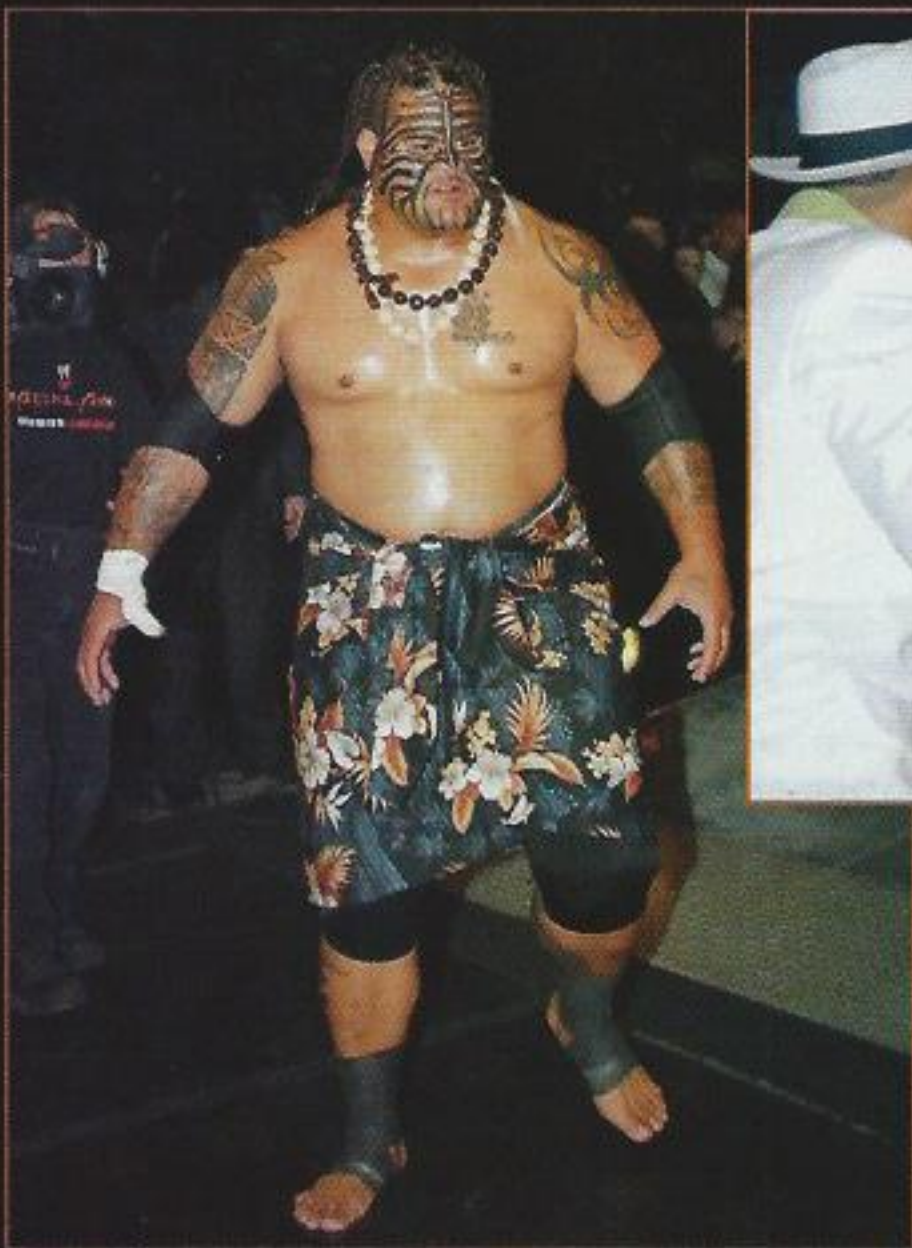
1. THE FLAIR ATTACK WAS A "CAN'T LOSE" PROPOSITION

Give Estrada credit for picking the perfect moment to introduce his massive charge. Flair is unquestionably one of wrestling's all-time greats, and a convincing beating of the "Nature Boy" would instantly make Umaga a star. Estrada

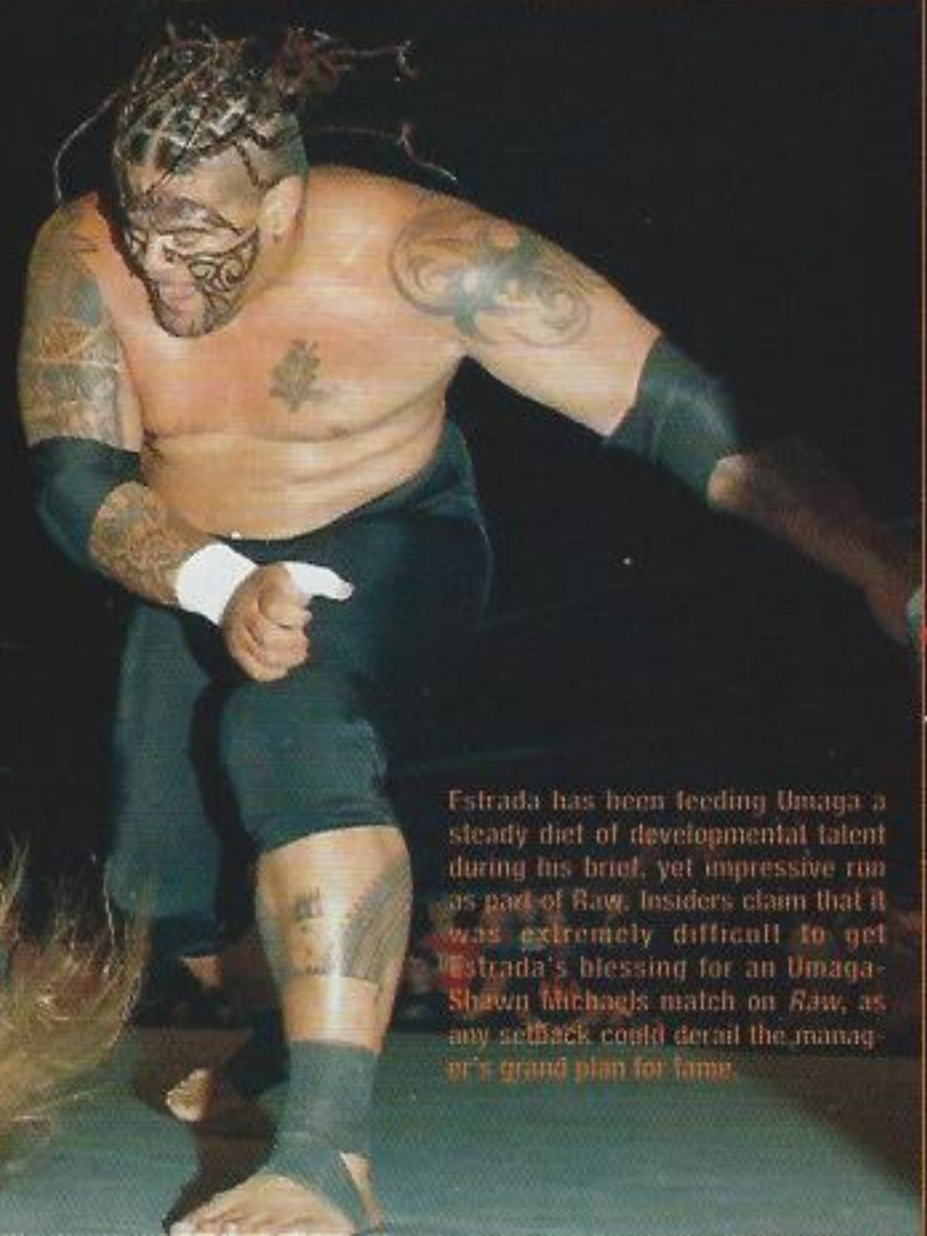
knew enough about Flair to know that he always has trouble against more powerful opponents—from Nikita Koloff and The Road Warriors to Triple-H and Batista. Flair is at his best when he can control the pace of a match and establish a ground game where he can outwrestle his opponent. Having Umaga interrupt Flair and by making the attack quick and not giving Flair a chance to react, Estrada all but guaranteed that Umaga would get the upper hand on Flair.

2. HANDPICKING OPPONENTS ISN'T HELPING

Since that debut, Estrada has resisted allowing WWE match-makers to put Umaga in the ring against any big-name competitors. Umaga has beaten an assortment of independent hopefuls (including Steve Lewington, Chris Guy, and Rory Fox), who were handpicked by the manager. "Those independent



The Raw brand's most vicious—and potentially unstoppable—Superstar, Umaga, has cut an impressive path of destruction the likes of which have not been seen on Monday night programming since the days of Bill Goldberg in WCW. This is a fact that has not been lost on Armando Alejandro Estrada, who seems to be the only person capable of controlling the "Samoa Bulldozer."



Estrada has been feeding Umaga a steady diet of developmental talent during his brief, yet impressive run as part of Raw. Insiders claim that it was extremely difficult to get Estrada's blessing for an Umaga-Shawn Michaels match on Raw, as any setback could derail the manager's grand plan for fame.

guys are very talented, but they're all a little nervous competing in front of such a huge audience on live TV," said one WWE backstage agent. "Before they can get their bearings, Umaga attacks and gets the win."

One matchmaker said he virtually had to "twist Estrada's arm" to sign Umaga against Shawn Michaels for the April 17 edition of *Raw*. "And then Estrada interfered the moment Michaels got the advantage," our source said.

Umaga may be collecting wins over these overmatched hopefuls, but he's not testing himself against WWE's upper tier. His status has been artificially inflated by wins over lesser competition. When he suffers that first high-profile loss, Umaga's stock will plummet.

3. ESTRADA LOVES CONTROVERSY

Before Estrada was a Cuban manager, he used to be an Iraqi bodyguard. Back in his early days in Ohio Valley Wrestling, Estrada was known as Osama and worked as the bodyguard for Muhammad Hassan and Daivari. Is he really a terrorist sympathizer? Of course not. But he knew it would get him more attention if he played along.

That's Estrada in a nutshell—he'll sell out his own morals or allies to get ahead or to make a quick buck.



A manager's role has traditionally been to look out for the welfare of his client, rather than to make himself the center of attention. One has to question where Estrada's intentions lie, as often he will redirect the spotlight from Umaga to himself.

4. ESTRADA IS EXHIBITING DIVA BEHAVIOR

According to several sources, Estrada books Umaga's flights and hotel accommodations as well as his own. But while Umaga flies in coach (and a 348-pound man in coach is not particularly comfortable), Estrada flies first-class. While Estrada arranges a cab to pick up Umaga and deliver him from the hotel to the arena, Estrada travels exclusively by limousine.

"The guy loves living the good life, that's for sure," said one *Raw* wrestler. "The guy probably spends more on those awful cigars than he gives Umaga for meals or travel money."

5. ESTRADA IS LOOKING TO ADD TO HIS STABLE

Several wrestlers have confirmed that Estrada has privately approached them and asked if they were in the market for a manager. In fact, according to some sources, Estrada spends more time backstage trying to sign new charges than he does prepping Umaga for his matches.

One referee who was backstage at Vengeance said he personally witnessed Estrada make a cash offer to Kim-Chee to manage Kamala. That's why Estrada refused to let Umaga lock up with the Ugandan giant at the pay-per-view. It wasn't until the next night on *Raw*, after Kim-Chee had spurned the offer, that Estrada unleashed Umaga on Kamala.

"If Umaga truly thinks that jerk has his best interests at heart, he's out of his mind," said Viscera, the only wrestler who would speak to us on the record for this report. "Armando 'whats-his-name' thinks he's the star and Umaga is a glorified bodyguard or something. If that big Samoan isn't careful, that manager is going to run him into the ground and straight to the poorhouse."

Based on our findings, we tend to agree with "Big Vis." □



Umaga's decimation of the legendary Ric Flair has been Estrada's best managerial decision to date. Destroying the "Nature Boy" gave Umaga instant credibility—and Estrada increased face-time on WWE programming.



FLASHBACK: 1976

IN EACH ISSUE, WE WILL LOOK BACK AT A DEFINING MOMENT IN WRESTLING HISTORY, ONE THAT CHANGED THE SPORT FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE, OR PERHAPS BOTH

ALI, INOKI SQUARE OFF IN ULTIMATE "BOXER vs. WRESTLER" MATCH

Heavily hyped "Superbout" is decried after 15 rounds of inaction

BACKGROUND

At the dawn of 1976, Muhammad Ali was coming off one of the greatest victories of his career, his "Thrilla in Manila" win over Joe Frazier. He was in the midst of his

At a meeting prior to their fight on June 26, 1976, Inoki presented Ali with a crutch, letting Ali know that the Japanese wrestler's goal was to fight a stiff match. Ali's team was so afraid Inoki would seriously injure the WBA titleholder that they demanded that many of Inoki's best moves would be deemed illegal.

third reign as heavyweight champion and was arguably the most recognizable athlete in the world.

Antonio Inoki was one of the top professional wrestlers in Japan, having achieved superstardom after a thrilling 1969 match against then-NWA World champion Dory Funk Jr. Inoki had trained under expert shootfighter Karl Gotch and helped develop the "strong style" of pro wrestling that incorporated aspects of submission grap-



MUHAMMAD ALI VS. ANTONIO INOKI: 1976



[INSIDE WRESTLING / THE WRESTLER]

pling with martial arts throws, chokes, and strikes.

To demonstrate that the strong style of wrestling could stand up to more traditional forms of hand-to-hand combat, Inoki began making challenges to experts in karate, judo, and boxing.

With interest in the martial arts such as karate and aikido on the rise, thanks in part to the popularity of Bruce Lee films, Inoki's boasts generated substantial attention. With Frazier vanquished and few credible heavyweight opponents on the horizon, a match against Inoki promised to be extremely lucrative for Ali, as well as Inoki. A match billed as the ultimate boxer vs. wrestler "Superbout" was signed. Ali looked at it as an easy payday; Inoki saw it as a chance to become a hero. Judo master Gene LeBell was named referee just to make sure there was no funny business once the bell rang.

WHAT HAPPENED

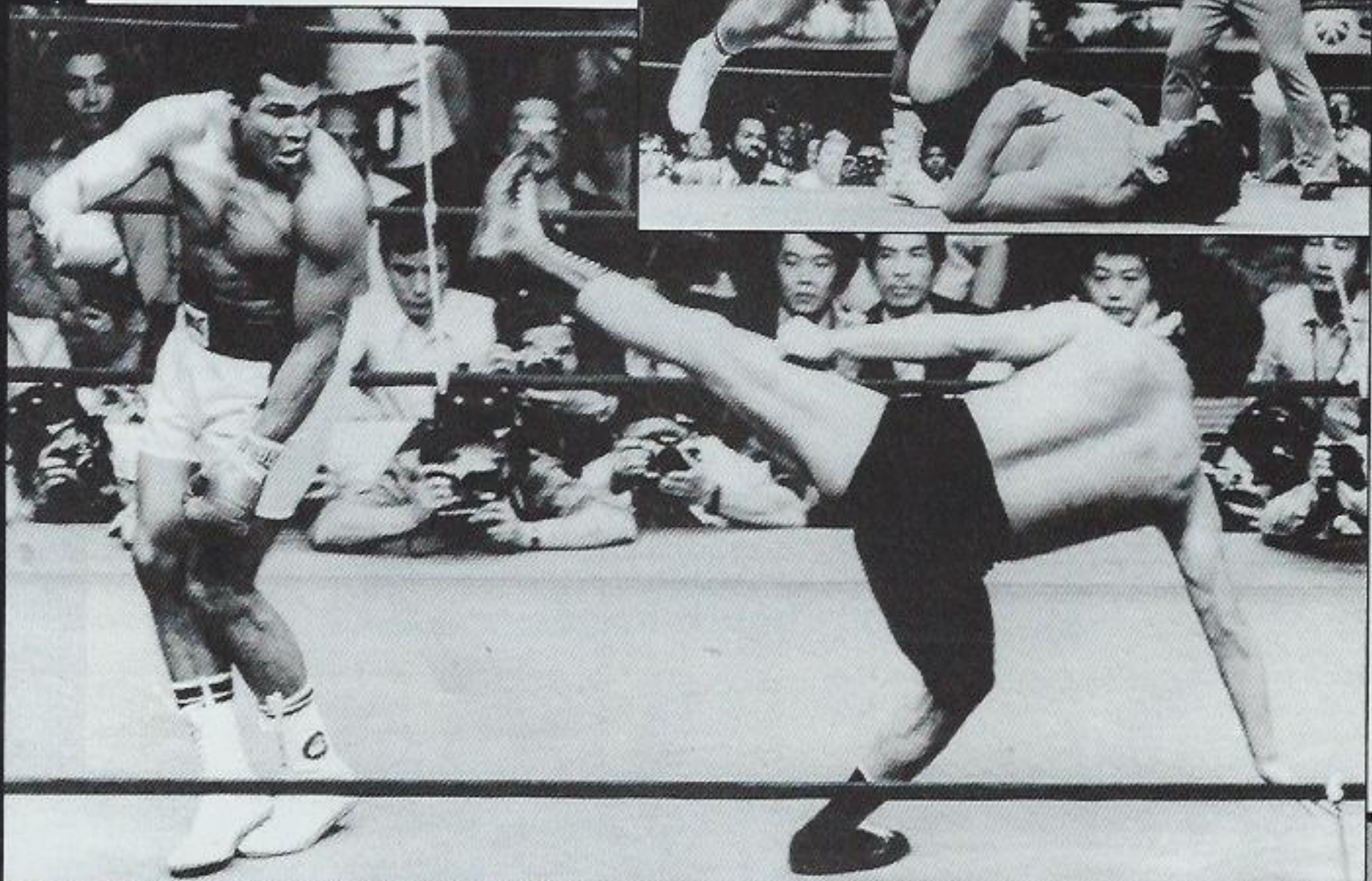
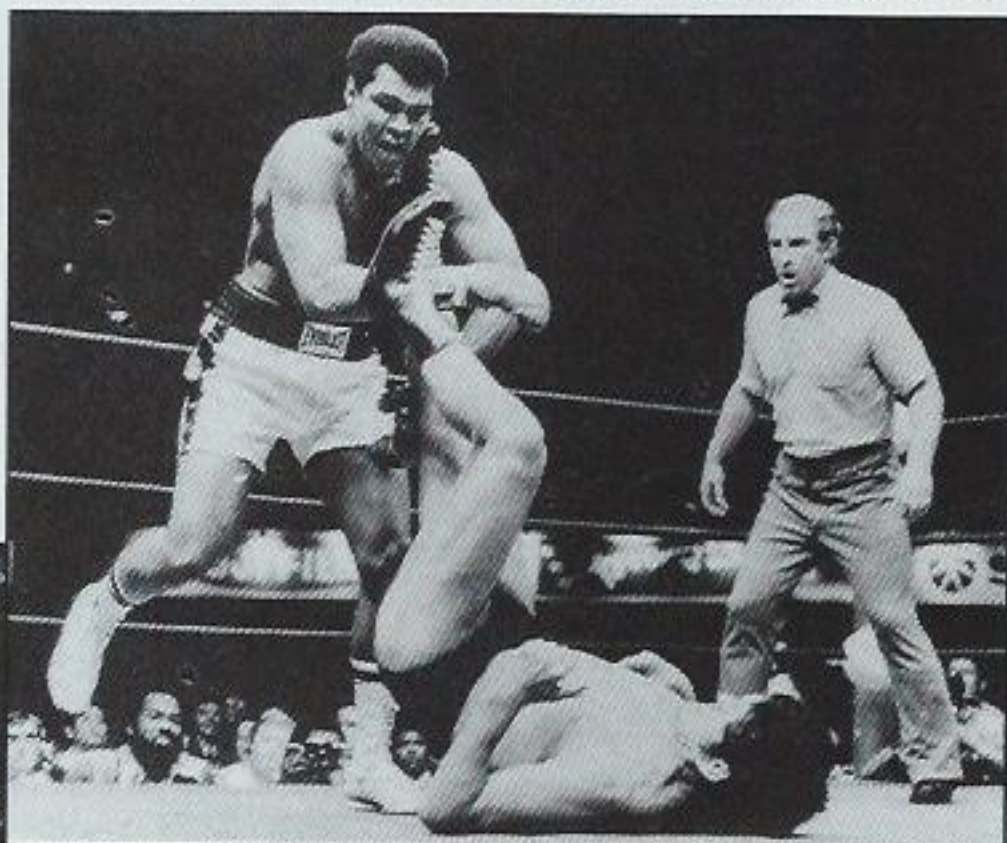
On June 25, 1976, Inoki and Ali stepped into the ring at Tokyo's Budokan Hall. The event aired live on closed-circuit TV at locations throughout the U.S. and drew more than 32,000 spectators to New York's Shea Stadium, where a live card also featured another boxer vs. wrestler match in Chuck Wepner vs. Andre the Giant and a

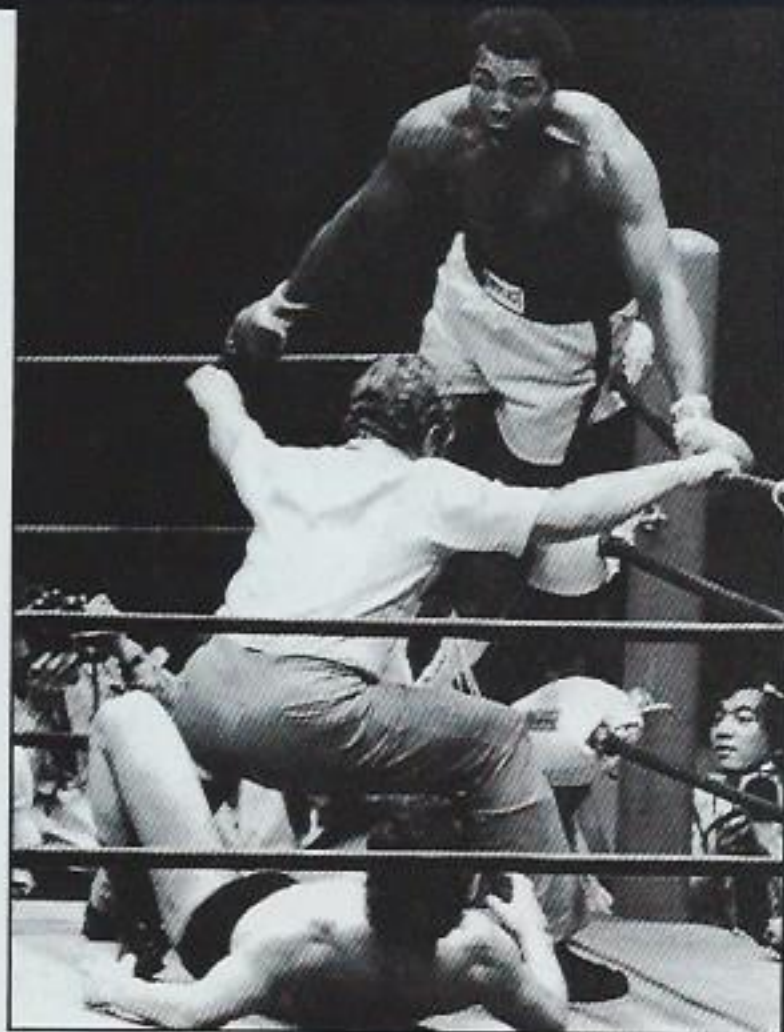
grudge wrestling match between Stan Hansen and Bruno Sammartino.

The Inoki and Ali camps had difficulty coming to terms on the rules of the match. Inoki was prohibited from executing takedowns and the match was to be contested under "striking rules," with some grappling allowed. That meant bodyslams, elbow and knee strikes, chops, and headbutts were all barred. Ali and his team were afraid that Inoki would use his grappling skills to break one of Ali's arms or legs and they successfully managed to ban the most dangerous aspects of Inoki's arsenal.

Frustrated with the restrictions, Inoki decided to use an unorthodox attack. He fought the entire match from a crab-walking defensive position, peppering Ali's legs with stiff kicks. Ali was unable to reach Inoki to connect with any punches and was unable to defend himself against Inoki's kicks. During the course of the 15-round contest, Ali landed a mere six punch-

When Ali's stipulations drastically eliminated Inoki's grappling move set, he came up with another plan: stay as far from the boxing champ's fists as possible. Inoki fought the majority of the 15-round bout from the mat, negating most of the champ's advantages.





Ali eventually resorted to jumping onto the ropes to avoid further injury from Inoki's tactics. It is believed that the match had such an impact on Ali's mobility that he was forced to alter his style, which may have resulted in a premature end of his career.

es of fewer than a dozen thrown, including one desperation cross in the 13th round.

The match turned into a 45-minute debacle, with Ali running away from Inoki, who crawled and threw kicks, but would not stand for fear of being punched out by Ali. At the conclusion of 15 rounds, the match was ruled a draw by the ringside judges. The fans in attendance booed the ruling and littered the ring with garbage as the combatants beat a hasty retreat from the ring.

An embarrassed Ali skipped a scheduled post-match press conference and went to the hospital to have his swollen legs and knees checked.

IMPLICATIONS

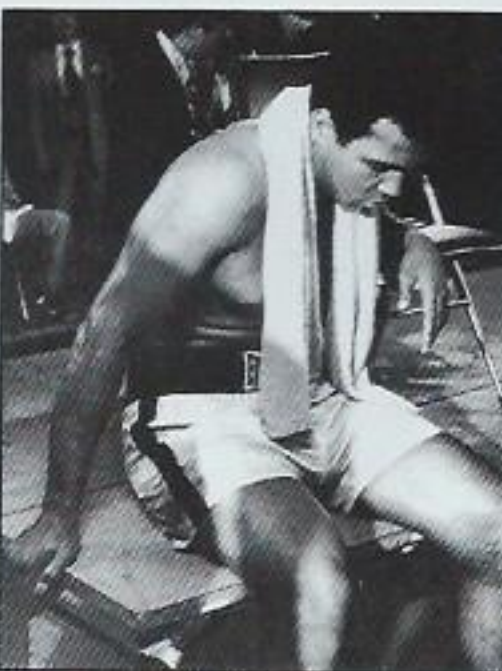
The implications of the Inoki-Ali fight depend on your perspective. To Inoki, it was a moral victory where he dominated arguably the greatest boxer of all-time. For wrestling fans, especially fans in Japan, it was a major victory for the sport of wrestling, giving enormous credibility to pro wrestling and to Inoki himself.

As for Ali, the accounts of the severity of the injuries he suffered in the match vary depending on the source. For 45 minutes, Ali absorbed kicks to his shins, knees, and thighs. Some observers say the punishment Ali absorbed in the match helped put a premature end to his career.

But as far as mainstream audiences and media were concerned, the match was an embarrassment. It has appeared not only on lists of the worst wrestling matches of



Fifteen rounds of tedium led to a draw, angering spectators, who responded by throwing garbage into the ring area at the Budokan Hall.



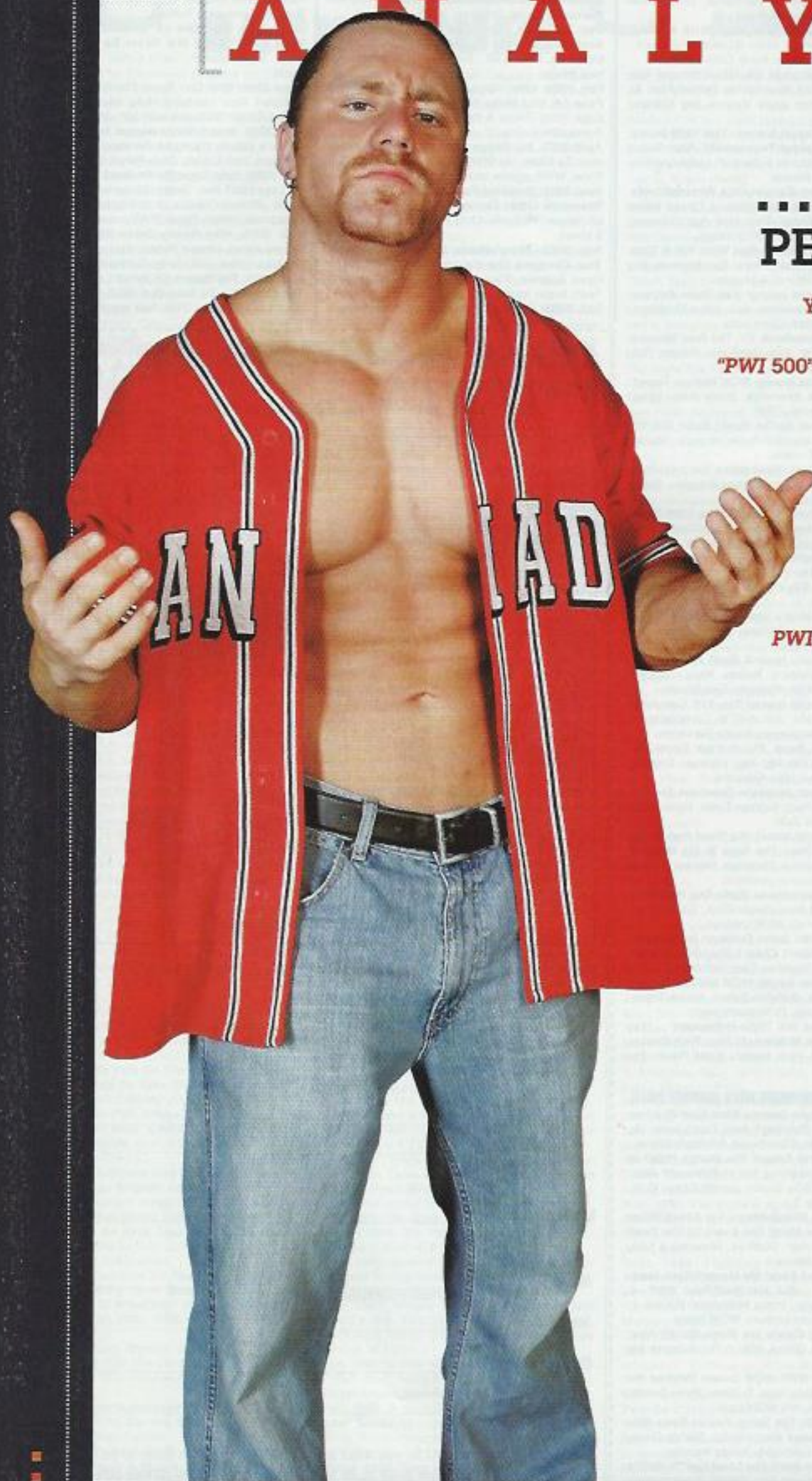
The media as well as mainstream audiences saw the fight as an embarrassment for Ali, who skipped the scheduled press conference after the match to tend to his wounds. Inoki, on the other hand, reveled in a moral victory that catapulted his career and Japanese wrestling as a whole.

all-time, but on lists of the worst sporting events ever. According to one report, it took janitors at Budokan Hall an entire day to clean up all

the garbage that was thrown into the ring after the fight.

In any case, Inoki went from being a top wrestler in Japan to becoming a legend. He used that status to help create New Japan Pro Wrestling. The match was also a forefather of the inter-disciplinary combat that would become known as mixed martial arts. The format of the contest and the undercard match between Andre and Wepner inspired the Hulk Hogan-Rocky Balboa fight scene in *Rocky III*. □

THE WRESTLING ANALYST



PETEY WILLIAMS

Years Pro: 4

Size: 5'7", 179

"PWI 500" Listings: 2005—23

2004—178

Titles: TNA X division

NWA Upstate No Limits

Border City Wrestling tag team

Border City Wrestling TV

IWA Mid-South

Elite Wrestling Revolution

heavyweight (2 times)

PWI Awards: Rookie of the Year:

1st runner-up (2004)

[THE NUMBERS]

Offense (9.5): Unlike Samoa Joe, Christopher Daniels, and others in TNA's X division who link maneuvers together in a sequence, Williams hits his opponents from all sides. If Williams nails an adversary with a flying forearm, for example, he will bounce off the opposite of the six-sided ring to deliver a flying bodypress. He is a dynamo.

Defense (8.5): By executing high-impact moves from various sides of the ring, he often gives his foe the precious few seconds necessary to mount a counterstrike. He rarely assumes a defensive posture—and that's why Williams is always three seconds away from defeat. Some opponents have scored the pinfall before Williams knew what hit him.

Experience (8.5): Williams has experience outside of TNA, primarily in Border City Wrestling (where he was trained by Scott D'Amore), IWA Mid-South, and Combat Zone Wrestling. The Ontario native has wrestled stars such as A.J. Styles and Teddy Hart, but has never toured extensively on foreign turf. Japan or Mexico would be perfect for him.

Conditioning (9.5): His physique has improved steadily over the past four years, to the point that he's arguably the best-conditioned wrestler in the X division. As a teenager, Williams devoted himself to weightlifting—along with amateur wrestling, football, and basketball—to prepare for a pro career. Williams' trapezius muscles are magnificent.

Science (8.5): Scott D'Amore and Bobby Clancy did a good job of training Williams in the fundamentals of scientific wrestling. But being trained in the science of wrestling isn't much different from being trained in the science of medicine. Williams should train with multiple experts to hone his craft.

Stamina (9.5): Williams' endurance has been put to the test in "Ultimate X" matches, in addition to the 20-man gauntlet match he won to capture the X title in 2004. While Williams has been lost in the shuffle as of late, he has displayed phenomenal stamina in recent matches, including a six-way bout at Slammiversary.

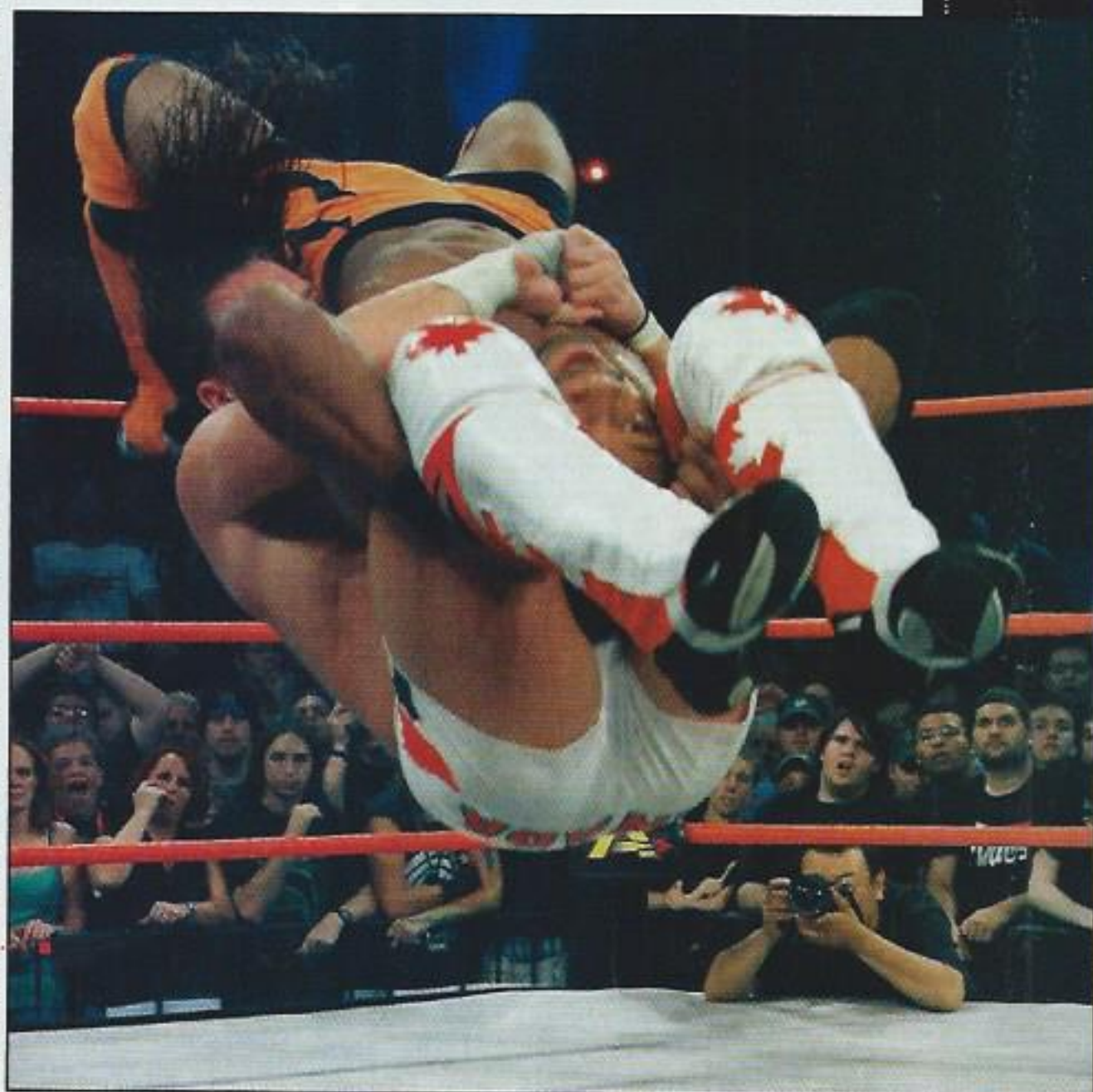
Power (9.0): He doesn't know his own strength—or at least hasn't learned how to utilize his power to maximum effectiveness. Sure, Williams has more snap to his huracanrana and more torque to his tilt-a-whirl suplex, but he needs to outmuscle and manhandle some of

these guys. Sonjay Dutt? Just flatten him with an old-fashioned bodyslam.

Speed (9.0): Fortunately, Williams' added musculature hasn't diminished his speed very much, mainly because his weight gain has been so gradual that his body has adapted easily. His foes should avoid any criss-cross scenarios in the six-sided ring because each bounce off the ropes gives Williams momentum—like a train gathering a head of steam.

Ability To Absorb Punishment (8.5): Williams has taken his share of bumps in "Ultimate X" matches and will probably have plenty of stuntman injuries when he retires, but has he ever been blinded by his own blood? Had his teeth jarred by a looping forearm to the face? Or had a mudhole stomped into him? No. He hasn't faced Samoa Joe yet.

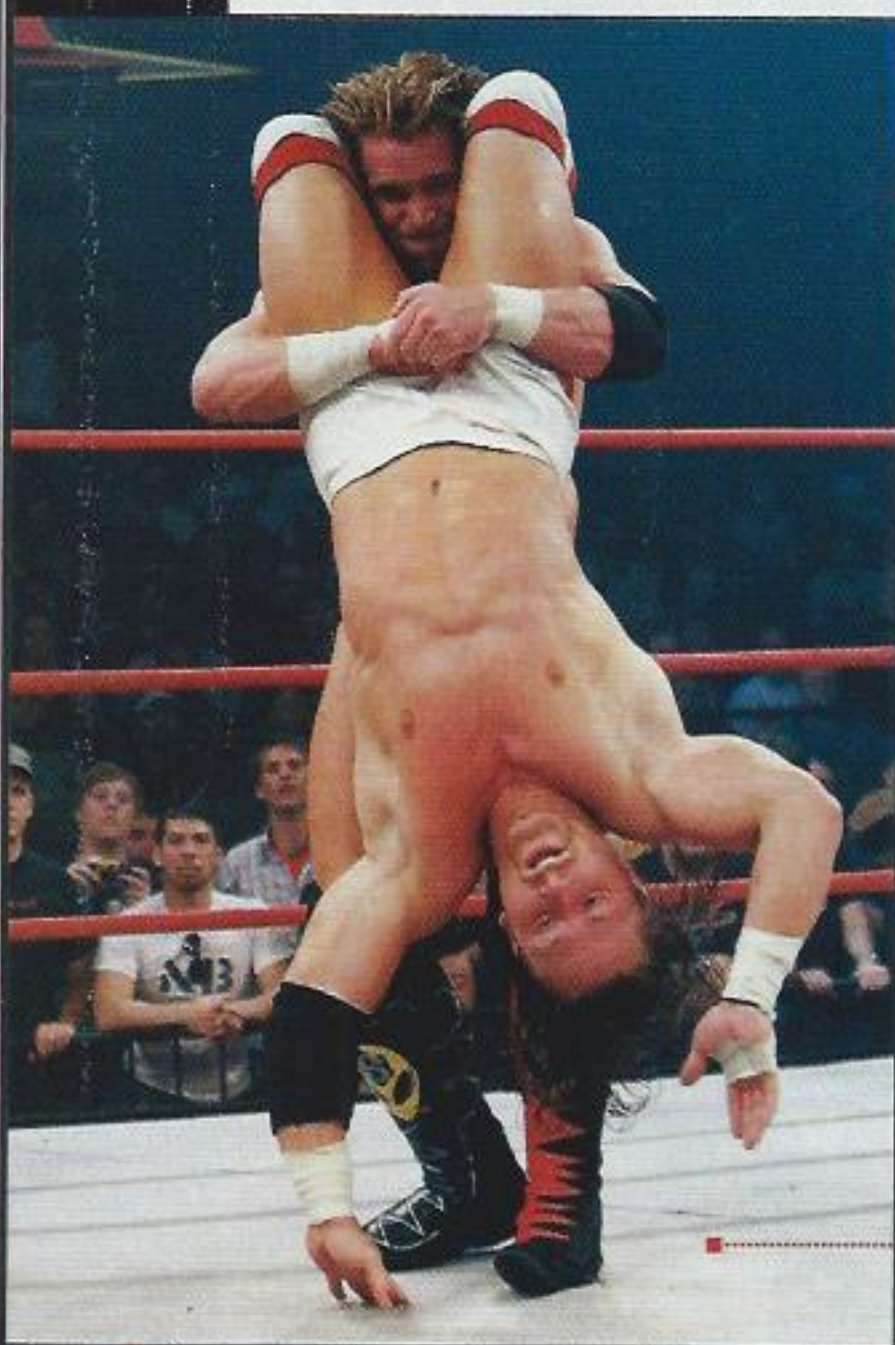
Quality Of Opposition (9.5): Now that new TNA managing director Jim Cornette has disbanded Team Canada, Williams may actually face the best competition he's had in several months. Williams vs. Bobby Roode, Eric Young, or Alistair Ralphz would be great matches. Nevertheless, he desperately needs to get into the Joe-Styles-Daniels mix.



① Petey Williams' greatest contribution to the sport of professional wrestling thus far has been his pioneering of the devastating "Canadian Destroyer" finishing move. The amazing maneuver has ended many a match in Williams' favor.



② Williams has kept himself in peak physical condition during his time with TNA. His strength and agility have increased with each passing month, making him arguably the best-conditioned X division wrestler on the roster.



③ For Williams, the best defense has been his stellar offensive output. Despite his diminutive stature, Williams is extremely powerful and thus able to surprise opponents while trapped in relatively precarious positions.

④ Part of Williams' success in his young career comes from a tremendous respect for the sport along with a sound wrestling mind. Toss in a mean streak a mile long and Williams has all the attributes of a champion.

[THE ANALYSIS]

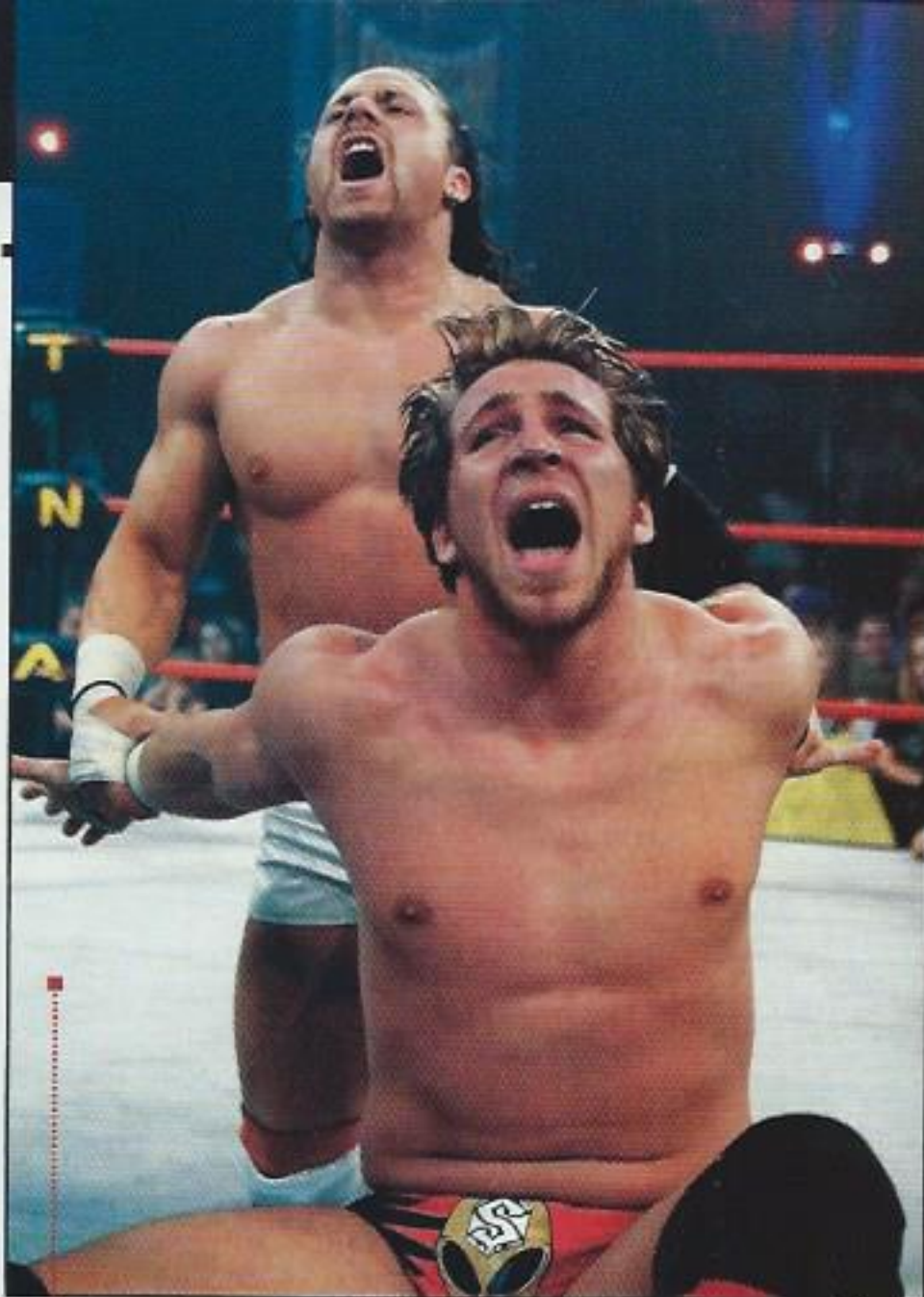
Repertoire: Williams uses his low center of gravity to his advantage, executing belly-to-belly suplexes and powerslams with precision. He has a range of slick moves, but his gift to wrestling will always be the "Canadian Destroyer." This maneuver, in which Williams flips both himself and his opponent into the air and lands in a piledriver position, is revolutionary, much like Scott Steiner's "Frankensteiner" in the late-1980s.

Strengths: Despite the cool confidence he exudes in the ring, Williams has a healthy respect for the sport. He remains in awe of his own stardom and appreciates his stint in TNA. "It's great to work so closely with Scott D'Amore and with so many of my heroes, like Jeff Jarrett and B.G. James," Petey Williams said in a previous interview with *The Wrestler*. "I'm not taking anything for granted." That explains his tremendous work ethic.

Weaknesses: What separates Williams from Eric Young, Alex Shelley, or Chris Sabin? Not much, except for his superior conditioning and his "Canadian Destroyer" finisher. Williams has done little to differentiate himself from the rest of the former Team Canada and the X division. This is true from not only a self-promotion standpoint, but also his failure—at times—to establish a commanding presence in the ring. He's only one of a talented pack.

Defining Career Moment: When Petey Williams emerged victorious in a three-way faceoff with Frankie Kazarian and Michael Shane at the end of a breathtaking 20-man gauntlet series, he realized on that night—August 11, 2004—that he had scored the biggest win of his career. He went on to enjoy the longest X title reign to date. But that was two years ago. What has he done lately? Williams is capable of even more.

Future: For Scott D'Amore, the decision to align Team Canada with Jeff Jarrett and America's Most Wanted turned out to be a disastrous one. For Petey Williams, Team Canada's disintegration could be a huge career boost. But Williams must break ties with D'Amore. Yes, Coach D'Amore led Williams to the X title, the Super 8 trophy, and launched his career. Now is the time for this 23-year-old star to become his own man.



⑤ The quality of Williams' opponents in TNA has been steadily impressive. The former X division champion has been successful against a wide array of X division talent, although he has yet to engage in a truly memorable feud.



⑥ Williams was extremely loyal to his mates in Team Canada, perhaps to his detriment. Williams ran the risk of getting buried by association. He may end up owing Jim Cornette a debt of gratitude for forcing the breakup.

EDITORS' ROUND TABLE

Does The New ECW Have Too Much Of An Old WWE Flavor?

SHOCK ... AND THEN cynicism. That's a pretty good way of summing up the reaction to the news this spring that WWE was planning to re-launch ECW on a full-time basis.



Since the announcement of its return, ECW has been widely criticized as being just another extension of the WWE empire. With a glaring lack of former ECW talent, men such as Sabu—well past their prime in wrestling years—have been relied upon to bridge the gap between the promotion of yesteryear and today's fan.

Rather than striking in the summer of 2005 (immediately following the first ECW One Night Stand pay-per-view, when ECW fever was at its strongest level since the promotion folded in 2001), Vince McMahon chose to wait 12 months and pull the trigger after the **second** ONS PPV. He even secured a weekly TV deal with the Sci-Fi Network (which airs a 60-minute ECW TV show every Tuesday night at 10 p.m. Eastern, usually emanating from the arena in which **Smackdown** tapes).

The first telecast was highly anticipated, highly rated, and widely critically panned. The fact that it was just another WWE show featuring mostly WWE stars was a common criticism. The reviews have gotten a little better overall since night one, but precious few of the stars who are receiving sustained pushes on the ECW TV show and at ECW house shows have strong connections to ECW or even seem to fit in ECW as we came to know and love it. RVD was the first champion of the new ECW, but he lost the belt to The Big Show. Meanwhile, such WWE-bred stars as Edge, Kurt Angle, and John Cena seem to get as much time in the spotlight as anyone else. And when the return of Test, who seems about as un-ECW as any wrestler on the planet, is hyped ad nauseum, well, something seems amiss.

This is certainly not your older degenerate brother's ECW, but then again, WWE has never hyped it as such. The company has been very upfront about the fact that ECW is not only being re-launched, but, in a sense, redefined. Whether this new, "redefined" ECW—with a heavy WWE influence—is a new and improved ECW (or even an entertaining ECW) is, of course, a matter of personal opinion. **INSIDE WRESTLING/THE WRESTLER** Publisher Stu Saks invited Contributing Editor Dave Lenker and Senior Writers Harry Burkett and Frank Krewda to discuss the topic in depth.

STU SAKS: Well, we've all had over a month to evaluate the WWE version of ECW, and I know there has been a lot of criticism, which I think we all expected. One thing I've heard a lot of is that the revived ECW really isn't much more than a third WWE brand; that it's not all that different from what we've seen from Raw and Smackdown, including the talent involved. So let's see what all of us think. Harry, I remember your idea for ECW a few months back was to make it a kind of purgatory that WWE wrestlers could be "sentenced" to. Do you think there's too much WWE in ECW so far?

HARRY BURKETT: I'm not ready to make my final judgment yet, but as of now, yes. It seems like ECW is



starting out as the little brother of Raw. We saw Rob Van Dam on *Raw* every week for the first month of this new ECW's existence, and Paul Heyman was a regular, too. Plus, it seems like Edge and John Cena have had as strong a presence on ECW's TV show on Tuesday night as anyone. ECW hardly seems like a separate entity.

DAVE LENKER: I'd agree with that to an extent, but what concerns me the most is the talent that's been pushed from the start. If Kurt Angle's neck hadn't betrayed him again, he'd be one of ECW's top stars right now—and he might yet be. Now we have The Big Show as ECW champion. The Big Show in ECW is something I thought I'd never see. But at least they're making an attempt to push this new young kid with a real upside and a true ECW attitude. You know, Test.

SAKS: I think I detect a hint of sarcasm there.

LENKER: Just a hint, Stu.

SAKS: But is it too soon to be so hard on WWE for this? It's not like the stars of ECW's golden years can just be brought back in their primes and pick up where they left off. WWE has made it clear that this will be a new version of ECW in a lot of ways. I think it has to be. Wrestling has to evolve and move forward.

FRANK KREWDA: I don't think it's too soon at all to be hard on WWE, Stu. We all have heard the saying that you don't get a second chance to make a good first impression. This year's One Night Stand pay-per-view was entertaining, but the top matches were John Cena vs. RVD, Tommy Dreamer and Terry Funk vs. Mick Foley and Edge, Tazz vs. Jerry Lawler, and my favorite, Kurt Angle vs. Randy Orton in ECW. That's way too much WWE. The ratings for ECW on Sci-Fi so far have exceeded the network's and probably even Vince Mc-

Mahon's expectations by quite a bit. There obviously is an audience giving the new ECW a chance. But if they get the same WWE wrestlers and WWE retreads like Test week after week, I'm afraid that those numbers are going to drop more than they already have.

LENKER: I understand the point, but I think that's being a little harsh. There's a real fine line here. We probably all agree with what Stu said. You can't just wave a wand and bring back all the ECW stars of 1997. Maybe some, but not all of them, and not many are worthy of a huge push at this point. For instance, The Sandman basically makes a cameo every week and beats up a faux-priest, a zombie, or a fat male stripper. He can't be a top guy anymore. On the other hand, you couldn't expect WWE to just throw a whole slew of new wrestlers out there on the first show and expect viewers to tune in and stay tuned in. You have to mix in the new guys from OVW and Deep South and, I hope, Ring of Honor. But I would say they need to start introducing and mixing them in a little quicker to appease fans looking for something a little different and new. That needs to be one of the hooks of ECW.

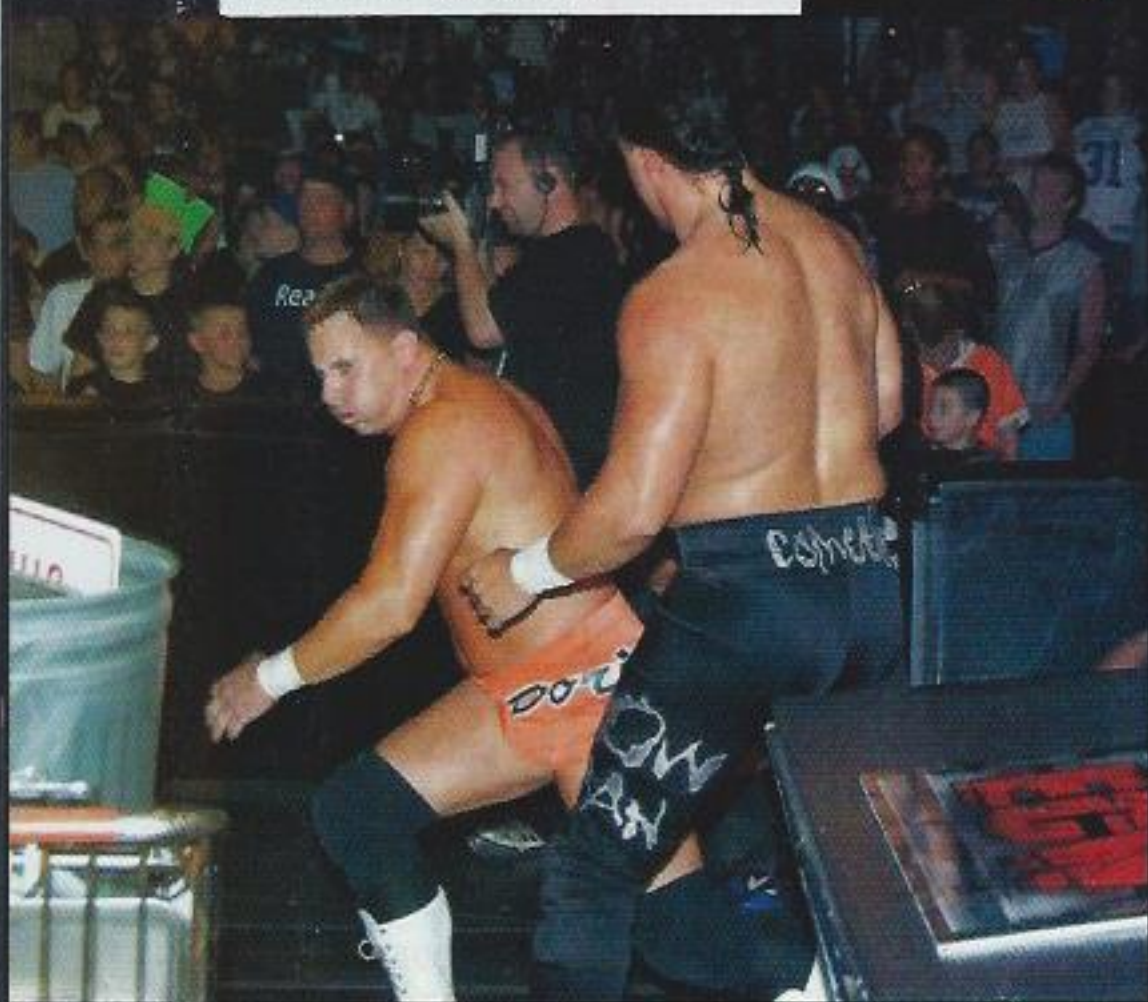
BURKETT: I believe that's my cue to bring up the name C.M. Punk. There's a reason for hope here. I'm glad to see him retaining the "Straight Edge" persona

The influx of WWE talent is undoubtedly the primary reason for the backlash exhibited by old-school ECW loyalists. Try as they might, WWE has been unable to have the fans truly accept Kurt Angle as the "face of ECW."

"You have to mix in the new guys from OVW and Deep South and, I hope, Ring of Honor. But I would say they need to start introducing and mixing them in a little quicker to appease fans looking for something a little different and new."

—Dave Lenker

WWE wrestlers such as Edge, Lita (right), and John Cena were all part of ECW programming when shows began airing in June. While fans have cringed at the thought of a WWE-run product, no one has really embraced the idea of a program made up entirely of ECW wrestlers—of which men like Al Snow and Danny Doring (below) might be major players.



he perfected in Ring of Honor. He's hardly a WWE-type wrestler if he's allowed to use the same style that got him signed by WWE.

KREWDA: And, as we know, where Vince and company are concerned, that's a big "if," Harry. It's hard for me to be too optimistic when the other new characters they've introduced are Mike Knox, who seems pretty generic to me, and Kelly Kelly, whose striptease tease is getting old real fast. I can't believe I said that, but it's true.

SAKS: I'm sensing that you're all skeptical and maybe even a bit cynical about the long-term future of the new ECW. I suppose that has something to do with the fact that Vince McMahon doesn't have a great track record with things not WWE. The WCW invasion of 2001 was a disaster, Goldberg didn't have nearly the impact he probably could have because he was made into too much of a standard "WWE Superstar," and the cruiserweight division that was such a huge success in WCW has all but dried up because the cruisers have had to adapt a

"WWE style," and so on. Besides C.M. Punk, are there reasons to be optimistic? Dave?

LENKER: I just wrote a column for this issue where I suggested that someone like Eugene could be repackaged and could succeed in ECW. I think WWE should look at that option. That way it could use its own talent in a more productive way to help boost ECW. I mean, what good are Eugene, Rob Conway, and Matt Hardy doing their respective brands right now? Let them hit the restart button in ECW. What is there to lose?

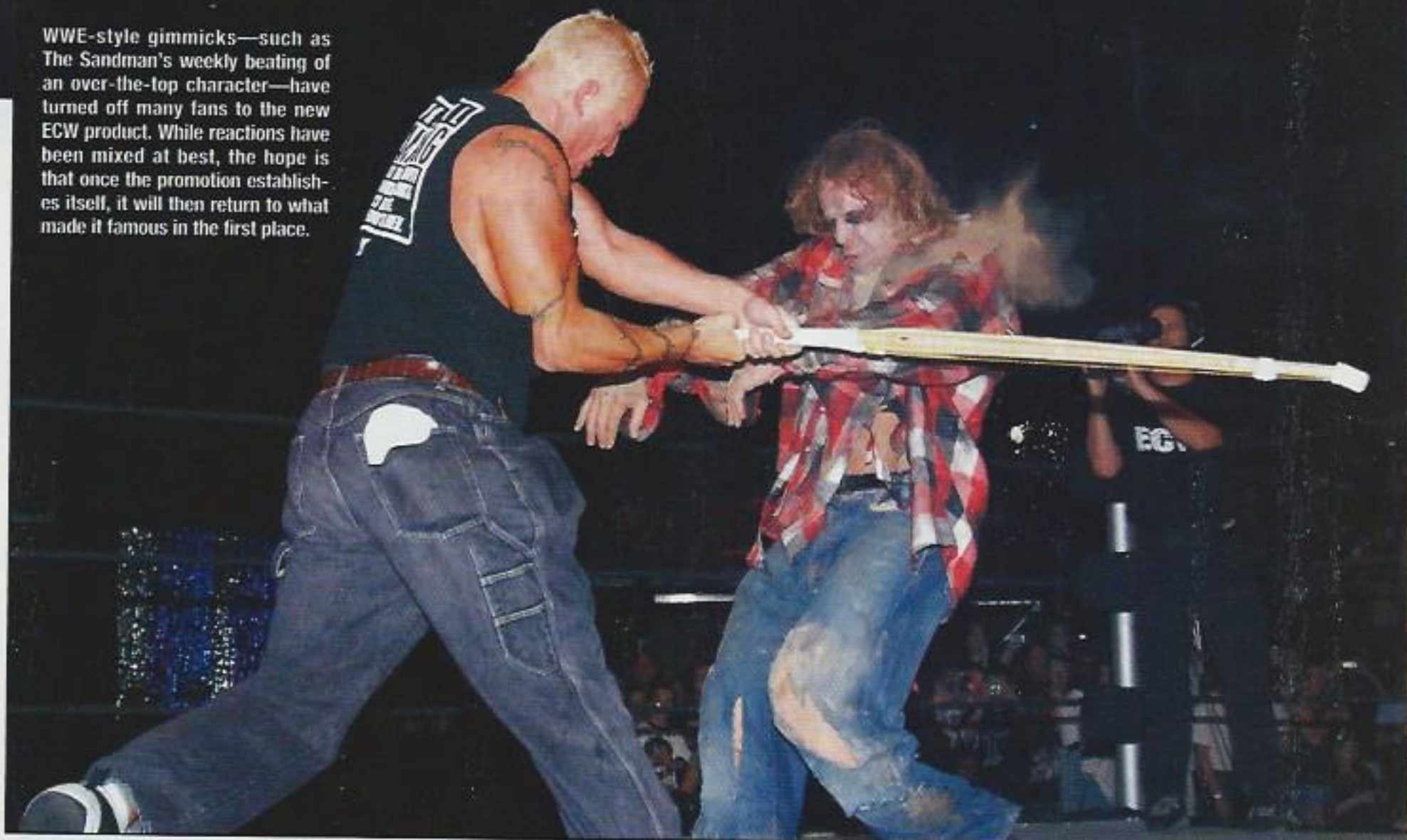
BURKETT: WWE needs to take a long, hard look at Ring of Honor and some other prominent independents and grab some of those lesser-known guys with a lot of talent. Let Paul Heyman mold them in his own way and see what happens.

KREWDA: I don't think it's too late to save this project, but I just wish Vince had the discipline to be hands-off instead of getting himself so involved. The crowds they're getting now are already being pretty hard on Test. Imagine what the real ECW crowds of years past would have done to him. Test in any ECW is just so ridiculous.

"The crowds they're getting now are already being pretty hard on Test. Imagine what the real ECW crowds of years past would have done to him. Test in any ECW is just so ridiculous."

—Frank Krewda

WWE-style gimmicks—such as The Sandman's weekly beating of an over-the-top character—have turned off many fans to the new ECW product. While reactions have been mixed at best, the hope is that once the promotion establishes itself, it will then return to what made it famous in the first place.



SAKS: Well, just to play devil's advocate, the old ECW did have a way of making stars out of guys that were either overlooked or who just didn't seem to have it in them. Think about it. Raven. Justin Credible. Mike Awesome. They were all veterans who had never made it big at all in the U.S. before ECW.

BURKETT: Interesting point, Stu, but that was when Paul Heyman had full creative control. Heyman knew how to accentuate positives and hide weaknesses of wrestlers he saw potential in. When ECW was revived back in June, it was reported that Heyman would have a lot of input creatively. But within weeks, word got out that McMahon wanted to mold it the way he saw fit. That doesn't bode well for ECW, I'm afraid.

KREWDA: If I have to come up with something positive here, it'd be that WWE is letting Sabu be Sabu to a large extent. He hasn't had to conform to whatever the WWE style is. I don't know, Sabu probably isn't capable of wrestling any other way than the way he does things, but he is giving us something we haven't seen in WWE much. That's a positive for ECW. So maybe in the future, others will be able to carve out their own unique styles.

LENKER: If we see Punk doing a lot of chinlocks and headlocks, we're in trouble.

SAKS: Well, I guess I can sum this one up fairly easily: We're all having a hard time being real optimistic that ECW is going to be more than a third WWE brand, but we're not giving up hope yet.

BURKETT: I'd say that's accurate, Stu. It might be worth reconvening and discussing this same subject in, say, six months. Things could be a lot different by then. I know I hope they are.

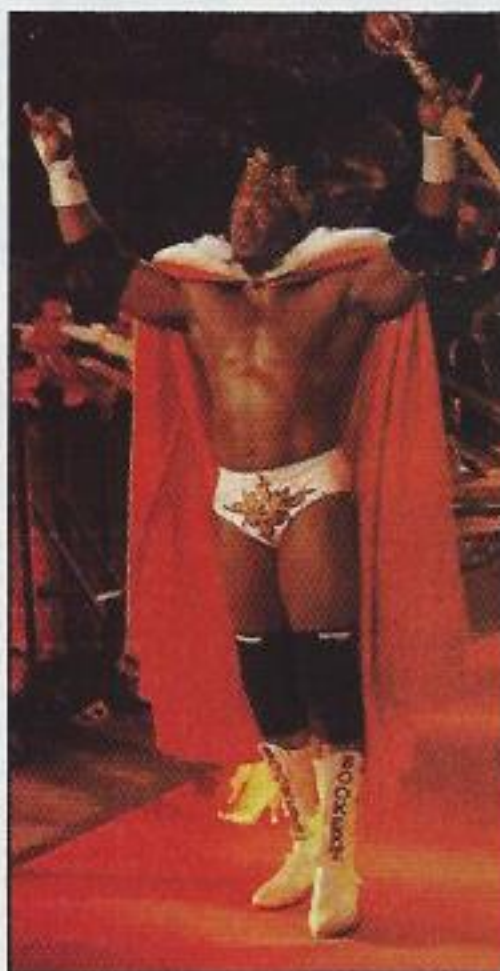


ECW nearly caused a riot when former WCW and WWE wrestler The Big Show (here during an "Extreme" battle royal) won the ECW title from Rob Van Dam in front of a very hardcore-partisan crowd in Philadelphia.

OFFICIAL RATINGS

TOP 10

- 1 EDGE**
240, Toronto, Ontario
(4) Raw World champion
- 2 JEFF JARRETT**
230, Nashville, TN
(-) NWA World champion
- 3 KING BOOKER**
250, Houston, TX
(-) Smackdown World champion
- 4 BRYAN DANIELSON**
185, Aberdeen, WA
(5) Ring of Honor champion
- 5 JOHN CENA**
260, West Newbury, MA
(9) No. 1 contender: Raw World title
- 6 JUN AKIYAMA**
240, Osaka, Japan
(7) GHC heavyweight champion
- 7 BATISTA**
318, Washington, DC
(2) No. 1 contender SD World title
- 8 TAIYO KEA**
235, Honolulu, HI
(-) All Japan Triple Crown Champion
- 9 HIROSHI TANAHASHI**
227, Ogaki, Gifu, Japan
(-) IWGP heavyweight champion
- 10 THE BIG SHOW**
493, Tampa, FL
(-) ECW champion



King Booker

TAG TEAMS

- 1 PAUL LONDON & SPANKY KENDRICK**
Combined weight: 380 pounds
(2) Smackdown World tag team champions
- 2 A.J. STYLES & CHRISTOPHER DANIELS**
Combined weight: 412 pounds
(7) NWA World tag team champions
- 3 THE SPIRIT SQUAD**
Combined weight: 433 pounds
(3) Raw World tag team champions
- 4 LATIN AMERICAN XCHANGE**
Combined weight: 495 pounds
(-) No. 1 contenders: NWA World tag team title
- 5 CHRIS HARRIS & JAMES STORM**
Combined weight: 516 pounds
(1) No. 2 contenders: NWA World tag team title
- 6 THE HIGHLANDERS**
Combined weight: 476 pounds
(9) No. 1 contenders: Raw World tag team title
- 7 AUSTIN ARIES & RODERICK STRONG**
Combined weight: 407 pounds
(6) Ring of Honor tag team champions
- 8 THE NEIGHBORHOODIE & SHAD GASPARD**
Combined weight: 517 pounds
(8) OVW Southern tag team champions
- 9 THE PITBULLS**
Combined weight: 392 pounds
(-) No. 1 contenders: SD World tag team title
- 10 MANABU NAKANISHI & TAKAO OMORI**
Combined weight: 505 pounds
(-) IWGP International tag team champions

WWE RAW

World Champion:

- EDGE**
(1) 240, Toronto, Ontario
- 1—JOHN CENA**
(2) 260, West Newbury, MA
 - 2—UMAGA**
(3) 348, Isle of Samoa
 - 3—JOHNNY NITRO**
(6) 204, Los Angeles, CA
 - 4—SHELTON BENJAMIN**
(4) 245, Spartanburg, SC
 - 5—CARLITO**
(5) 220, San Juan, Puerto Rico
 - 6—TRIPLE-H**
(7) 274, Greenwich, CT
 - 7—SHAWN MICHAELS**
(8) 217, San Antonio, TX
 - 8—RIC FLAIR**
(-) 243, Charlotte, NC
 - 9—RANDY ORTON**
(-) 245, St. Louis, MO
 - 10—EUGENE**
(-) 226, Jeffersonville, IN

WWE SMACKDOWN

World Champion:

- KING BOOKER**
(4) 250, Houston, TX
- 1—BATISTA**
(-) 318, Washington, DC
 - 2—REY MISTERIO JR.**
(C) 163, San Diego, CA
 - 3—THE GREAT KHALI**
(3) 420, Bombay, India
 - 4—FINLAY**
(7) 235, Belfast, Ireland
 - 5—THE UNDERTAKER**
(5) 304, Dallas, TX
 - 6—KEN KENNEDY**
(9) 246, Minneapolis, MN
 - 7—BOBBY LASHLEY**
(2) 255, Topeka, KS
 - 8—MATT HARDY**
(6) 213, Cameron, NC
 - 9—GREGORY HELMS**
(8) 210, Raleigh, NC
 - 10—WILLIAM REGAL**
(-) 240, London, England

ECW

ECW Champion:

- THE BIG SHOW**
(-) 493, Tampa, FL
- 1—SABU**
(-) 220, Bombay, India
 - 2—ROB VAN DAM**
(-) 237, Battle Creek, MI
 - 3—TOMMY DREAMER**
(-) 265, Yonkers, NY
 - 4—MIKE KNOX**
(-) 280, Phoenix, AZ
 - 5—THE SANDMAN**
(-) 244, Sandy, UT
 - 6—C.M. PUNK**
(-) 210, Chicago, IL
 - 7—MAHONEY**
(-) 361, Nutley, NJ
 - 8—TEST**
(-) 285, Toronto, Ontario
 - 9—DANNY DORING**
(-) 201, Pepper Pike, OH
 - 10—KURT ANGLE**
(-) 220, Pittsburgh, PA

TNA

NWA World Champion:

- JEFF JARRETT**
(4) 230, Nashville, TN
- 1—STING**
(3) 255, Venice Beach, CA
 - 2—CHRISTIAN CAGE**
(C) 225, Toronto, Ontario
 - 3—SAMOA JOE**
(10) 270, Isle of Samoa
 - 4—SCOTT STEINER**
(-) 275, Atlanta, GA
 - 5—A.J. STYLES**
(8) 202, Gainesville, GA
 - 6—CHRISTOPHER DANIELS**
(9) 210, Los Angeles, CA
 - 7—ABYSS**
(2) 295, parts unknown
 - 8—SENSHI**
(7) 170, Brooklyn, NY
 - 9—MONTY BROWN**
(6) 275, Detroit, MI
 - 10—RHINO**
(-) 275, Detroit, MI

Top 10 and tag team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue. Note: In an effort to keep the ratings as up-to-date as possible, these pages are often the last to be sent to the printer. Thus, the ratings may reflect changes not reflected in the remainder of the issue.

FOR PERIOD ENDED JULY 24, 2006

AMERICAN WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: AWA Champion—Ric Converse; 1—Takao Omori; 2—Steve Corino; 3—Aaron Aguilera; 4—Shinjiro Otani; 5—Ricky Landell; 6—Dinn T. Moore; 7—Mark Jindrak; 8—John Heidenreich; 9—Tully Blanchard; 10—Kaimana.

AWA/CWF MID-ATLANTIC: Champion—Rob McBride; 1—Joey Silvia; 2—Garry Stevens; 3—Jesse Ortega; 4—Otto Schwanz; 5—Mikael Yamaha; 6—Xsiris; 7—Mitch Connor; 8—Tank Lawson; 9—Marcellus King; 10—Gemini Kid.

AWA SUPREME CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Eric Draven; 1—Hamid Jihad; 2—Nic Noble; 3—Robert Royale; 4—Ricky Ruckus; 5—Billy Maverick; 6—Chris Blayze; 7—Vito Andretti; 8—Biff Wellington III; 9—Jack Black; 10—American Superstar.

CHAMPIONSHIP PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Leslie Leatherman; 1—Shane Shadows; 2—Bob Keller; 3—Bill Bain; 4—Jake Davis; 5—Hyjinx; 6—Cody McGraw; 7—The Patriot; 8—King Kaluha; 9—Brian Johnson; 10—Switchblade.

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—Freak Nasty; 1—Mike Tobin; 2—Kermon The German; 3—Aden Chambers; 4—Andrew Ryker; 5—Scotty Charisma; 6—Mega; 7—Mr. Ooh La La; 8—Mike Reed; 9—Billy Bax; 10—Rob Eckos.

MARYLAND CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Adam Flash; 1—Christian Cage; 2—Julio Dinero; 3—Corporal Punishment; 4—The Bruiser; 5—Chris Sabin; 6—Ruckus; 7—Monty Brown; 8—Josh Daniels; 9—Jerry Lynn; 10—Derek Frazier.

MAXIMUM CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—E.L. Stanley Esq.; 1—Massive Mike; 2—Sam Jones; 3—Matt Turner; 4—Chris Wylder; 5—Rockin Rebel; 6—Special Security James; 7—Stay-C Adams; 8—Eric Chapel; 9—Lumberjack Monroe; 10—Jimmy Dream.

MID-SOUTH WRESTLING: Champion—Vacant; 1—Prince Al Farat; 2—Steve Frost; 3—Matt Riviera; 4—Wes Jones; 5—Frank Thornton; 6—Jeff Jett; 7—Ace; 8—Cody Jones; 9—Tim Warcloud; 10—Gary Gram.

MID-STATES WRESTLING: Champion—Butch Reed; 1—Michael Barry; 2—Griz; 3—Jake Boulder; 4—Kraig Keesaman; 5—Jason Jones; 6—Gary Gram; 7—Kevin Lovejones; 8—Jack Dalton; 9—Aaron Neil; 10—Thomas Thorn.

NATIONAL WRESTLING LEAGUE: Champion—Gutterboy; 1—The Patriot; 2—John Rambo; 3—Samu; 4—Kevin Featherstone; 5—Axl Rotten; 6—Blackhawk; 7—Chris Cline; 8—Scott Vaughn; 9—Doink the Clown; 10—Tracy Smothers.

NWA UPSTATE: Champion—Brodie Lee; 1—Eric Everlast; 2—John McChesney; 3—Sterling James Keenan; 4—Jimmy Olsen; 5—Mastiff; 6—Madden Fisher; 7—Van Atlas; 8—Gabe Saint; 9—Mark Krieger; 10—Big Cat.

WORLD CLASS EXTREME WRESTLING: Champion—The Big Law Man; 1—Aaron Devil; 2—Dr. Luv; 3—Ace Crusader; 4—Josh Hunter; 5—Zane Dawson; 6—Corey Edsel; 7—Tre G; 8—Xavier Rush; 9—Tyrone Knox; 10—Slick.

WORLD X-TREME WRESTLING: Champion—Samu; 1—Samoan Storm; 2—D.J. Hyde; 3—Mongoose; 4—Sugaa; 5—Kris Krude; 6—The Dynamic Sensation; 7—Supreme Lee Great; 8—Toa Maivia; 9—Nuisance; 10—Damage.

RING OF HONOR

ROH Champion:

BRYAN DANIELSON

(C) 185, Aberdeen, WA

1—NIGEL McGUINNESS

(1) 220, London, England

2—COLT CABANA

(3) 235, Chicago, IL

3—SAMOA JOE

(10) 270, Isle of Samoa

4—RODERICK STRONG

(8) 205, Tampa, FL

5—HOMICIDE

(2) 220, Brooklyn, NY

6—AUSTIN ARIES

(9) 202, Milwaukee, WI

7—DAVEY RICHARDS

(6) 202, Othello, WA

8—JIMMY RAVE

(5) 175, Atlanta, GA

9—CHRISTOPHER DANIELS

(4) 210, Los Angeles, CA

10—A.J. STYLES

(-) 202, Gainesville, GA

OVW

OVW Champion:

C.M. PUNK

(C) 220, Chicago, IL

1—SETH SKYFIRE

(2) 195, Birmingham, AL

2—BRENT ALBRIGHT

(-) 230, Bayside, CA

3—AARON STEVENS

(1) 240, Martha's Vineyard, MA

4—BORIS ALEXIEV

(3) 255, Moscow, Russia

5—THE NEIGHBORHOODIE

(7) 222, parts unknown

6—SHAD GASPARD

(4) 285, Brooklyn, NY

7—ELIJAH BURKE

(8) 230, Jacksonville, FL

8—KASEY JAMES

(6) 235, Memphis, TN

9—CHET THE JET

(9) 230, Buffalo, NY

10—ROADKILL

(5) 302, Lancaster, PA

JAPAN

1—JUN AKIYAMA

(2) 240, Osaka, Japan

GHC heavyweight champion

2—TAIYO KEA

(-) 235, Honolulu, HI

All Japan Triple Crown champion

3—HIROSHI TANAHASHI

(-) 227, Ogaki, Gifu, Japan

IWGP heavyweight champion

4—KENTA KOBASHI

(4) 282, Fukuchiyama, Japan

5—TOSHIKI KAWADA

(5) 245, Ashikaga, Japan

6—GIANT BERNARD

(8) 380, Boston, MA

7—GENICHIRO TENRYU

(7) 235, Tokyo, Japan

8—KENTA

(9) 176, Saitama, Japan

9—HIROYOSHI TENZAN

(6) 270, Tokyo, Japan

10—KOJI KANEMOTO

(10) 205, Osaka, Japan

MEXICO

1—MISTICO

(1) 194, Mexico City, Mexico

2—NEGRO CASAS

(2) 185, Mexico City, Mexico

3—DR. WAGNER JR.

(4) 215, Mexico City, Mexico

4—PERRO AGUAYO JR.

(5) 165, Zacatecas, Mexico

5—ULTIMO GUERRERO

(3) 173, Mexico City, Mexico

6—ATLANTIS

(6) 180, Guadalajara, Mexico

7—BLACK WARRIOR

(8) 198, Torreon, Mexico

8—LA PARKA

(7) 235, Torreon, Mexico

9—CIBERNETICO

(10) 175, Mexico City, Mexico

10—REY BUCANERO

(9) 207, Mexico City, Mexico

ROLL CALL OF CHAMPIONS

FOR PERIOD ENDED JULY 24, 2006

ALL JAPAN INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: VACANT
(Most recently held by Jamal & Taiyo Kea)

ALL JAPAN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: SHUJI KONDO
(October 22, 2005; from Taka Michinoku; Tokyo, Japan)

ALL JAPAN TRIPLE CROWN CHAMPION: TAIYO KEA
(July 3, 2006; from Satoshi Kojima; Tokyo, Japan)

AMERICAN WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: RIC CONVERSE
(June 14, 2006; from Takao Omori; Indianapolis, IN)

BORDER CITY WRESTLING CAN-AM HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: ABYSS
(September 15, 2005; beat Bobby Roode; Windsor, Ontario)

BORDER CITY WRESTLING TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:
JIMMY JACOBS & PHIL ATLAS
(July 22, 2005; from Danny Daniels & N8 Mattson; Windsor, Ontario)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:
FREAK NASTY
(January 28, 2006; from Fred Sampson; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION MID-ATLANTIC CHAMPION: MIKE TOBIN
(March 4, 2006; from Japanese Pool Boy; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:
ANDREW RYKER & ADEN CHAMBERS
(May 13, 2006; from The Valedictorians; Newark, DE)

HEARTLAND WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: JON MOXLEY
(May 9, 2006; from Pepper Parks; Cincinnati, OH)

HEARTLAND WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:
THE MAVERICKS
(July 11, 2006; from Foreign Intelligence; Cincinnati, OH)

IWA MID-SOUTH HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: TOBY KLEIN
(June 17, 2006; from Trik Davis; Streamwood, IL)

IWA MID-SOUTH LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: JOSH AMBERCROMBIE
(January 21, 2006; beat Tyler Black; Midlothian, IL)

IWF AMERICAN CHAMPION: JUSTIN CORINO
(January 21, 2006; from Shane O'Brien; West Paterson, NJ)

IWF HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KEVIN KNIGHT
(October 22, 2005; from Damian Adams; West Paterson, NJ)

IWF TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TONY TORRES & ANTONIO RIVERA
(April 22, 2006; from Travis Blake & Shawn Donovan; West Paterson, NJ)

IWGP HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: HIROSHI TANAHASHI
(July 17, 2006; title was vacant; Sapporo, Japan)

IWGP INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:
MANABU NAKANISHI & TAKAO OMORI
(July 17, 2006; from Masa Chono & Hiroyoshi Tenzan; Sapporo, Japan)

IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KOJI KANEMOTO
(May 3, 2006; from Tiger Mask IV; Fukuoka, Japan)

NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE WORLD CHAMPION: JEFF JARRETT
(June 18, 2006; from Christian Cage; Orlando, FL)

NWA WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: A.J. STYLES & CHRISTOPHER DANIELS
(June 18, 2006; from Chris Harris & James Storm; Orlando, FL)

NWA SHOCKWAVE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: BOBBY ROODE
(March 22, 2006; from Josh Daniels; Deer Park, NY)

NWA SHOCKWAVE TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: THE S.A.T.
(March 26, 2006; from All Money Is Legal; Dover, NJ)

OHIO VALLEY WRESTLING HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: C.M. PUNK
(May 3, 2006; from Brent Albright; Louisville, KY)

OVW SOUTHERN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:
SHAD GASPARD & THE NEIGHBORHOODIE
(May 24, 2006; from Roadkill & Kasey James; Louisville, KY)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA CHAMPION: JOEY RYAN
(December 3, 2005; from Kevin Steen; Los Angeles, CA)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:
SCOTT LOST & CHRIS BOSH
(May 20, 2006; from Super Dragon & Davey Richards; Los Angeles, CA)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN CHAMPION: JUN AKIYAMA
(January 22, 2006; from Akira Taue; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: TAKASHI SUGIURA
(June 4, 2006; from KENTA; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:
KENTA KOBASHI & TAMON HONDA
(June 4, 2006; from Takeshi Morishima & Mohammed Yone; Tokyo, Japan)

RING OF HONOR CHAMPION: BRYAN DANIELSON
(September 17, 2005; from James Gibson; Lake Grove, NY)

RING OF HONOR PURE CHAMPION: NIGEL MCGUINNESS
(August 27, 2005; from Samoa Joe; Williamsville, NY)

RING OF HONOR TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: AUSTIN ARIES & RODERICK STRONG
(December 17, 2005; from Tony Mamaluke & Sal Rinauro; Edison, NJ)

TNA X CHAMPION: SENSHI
(June 26, 2006; from Samoa Joe; Orlando, FL)

WWE CRUISERWEIGHT CHAMPION: GREGORY HELMS
(January 29, 2006; from Kid Kash; Miami, FL)

WWE INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION: JOHNNY NITRO
(June 25, 2006; from Shelton Benjamin; Charlotte, NC)

(WWE) SMACKDOWN WORLD CHAMPION: BOOKER T
(July 23, 2006; from Rey Mysterio Jr.; Indianapolis, IN)

(WWE) RAW WORLD CHAMPION: EDGE
(July 3, 2006; from Rob Van Dam; Philadelphia, PA)

WWE RAW WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: THE SPIRIT SQUAD
(April 3, 2006; from The Big Show & Kane; Chicago, IL)

WWE SMACKDOWN WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:
PAUL LONDON & BRIAN KENDRICK
(May 21, 2006; M-N-M; Phoenix, AZ)

WWE U.S. CHAMPION: FINLAY
(July 14, 2006; from Bobby Lashley; Minneapolis, MN)

WWE WOMEN'S CHAMPION: MICKIE JAMES
(April 2, 2006; from Trish Stratus; Chicago, IL)